

September  
1994

# INTERREGNUM

#6



*fantasy roleplaying and more*

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*An Amateur Press Association  
covering fantasy roleplaying games  
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Humor"

September 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Press Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription costs \$1.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing. Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

Peter Maranci  
81 Washington St., #2  
Malden, MA 02148

Phone #: (617) 397-7958 (please leave a message on the answering machine)

InterNet Email: maranci@max.tiac.net

Since Interregnum is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$1 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail 380 good double-sided copies of their zine to the editor. The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

Copyright [Your Name] [Date]  
or  
© [Your Name] [Date]

Sample issues of Interregnum are available at \$3 each for US addresses, and \$4 in US funds for foreign/overseas mailing.

Many trademarked products are discussed in Interregnum. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

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## PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #7 is October 6<sup>th</sup>. Zines for Interregnum #8 must arrive by November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

⇒ In honor of the season the topic for Interregnum #7 is **Horror**. And for those who were wondering, the topic for the December issue will be *Resurrection*. ☺

—>Pete

"M

ay you live in interesting times" might not *really* be an ancient Chinese curse, but it's a good description of the state of Interregnum and the roleplaying hobby these days. Particularly the hobby. Do these things come in cycles? ☺

## The Factsheet 5 Fiasco

I mailed a copy of Interregnum #1 to a magazine called Factsheet 5 several months ago. Factsheet 5 is a review magazine, covering the world of amateur publishing; they were mentioned in an article on 'zines in a recent issue of Rolling Stone. It seemed a good way to get out the word about IR.

When the review finally came out in issue #52 of Factsheet 5 I was surprised to see that it was written by the chief editor, rather than the science-fiction writer on the F5 staff. I was even more surprised to see that the review was bad. Very bad. In fact, it couldn't have been much worse. The strangest thing was that the reviewer didn't seem to be talking about Interregnum—it was almost as if he hadn't read it at all. Here's the review:

"Interregnum: A new APA focusing on SF and RPGs. 10 contributors in this premier issue. Most just talking about their background and gaming experiences. It appears that all of the contributors are on the Net so they talk about many of the things they've found there." (pp. 87, Science Fiction section of Factsheet 5 #52)

Let me put this in perspective: most zines were very positively reviewed. A search so far has revealed not one other zine about which some complimentary thing was not said, out of hundreds of reviews. The other magazines in the science fiction/RPG section (which included a number of prozines) were, for the most part, lavishly praised. However, IR was one of only two magazines in that section that had been reviewed by the chief editor rather than the science-fiction editor. He praised the other RPG zine for giving tips on "the hot new game Gathering the Magic (sic)"—the chief editor obviously knows nothing at all about gaming.

Adding insult to injury, the editor wrote in the beginning of F5: "How do you know what's good? Check the length of the review. In general, the more we say about a zine the more we like it."

The review of Interregnum was one of the shortest in the issue. After several re-readings it seemed to me that the review *had* to have been written without more than a one-minute scan of Interregnum at best; factually, it was just plain wrong. Even though writers introduced themselves in IR #1, my rigorous count turned up 42 pages of original (non-"background and gaming experiences") material out of 57 total zine pages. And the Net is, after all, not a topic of discussion in IR.

I was pretty annoyed, so I wrote to the F5 science fiction reviewer and suggested that IR hadn't actually been read; I'd live with a bad review, but at least it could have been skimmed in greater detail. If they were going to fake a review, let them do a better job of it!

The science fiction reviewer responded promptly. He had been too busy to read all the SF zines for that issue, and so had passed on a few to the chief editor for review. However, he informed me, the chief editor didn't generally read the material he reviewed. Yes, Interregnum had just been quickly skimmed.

Wonderful. We were nationally slammed by an idiot who wrote the review the way I used to write book reports in grade school: by skimming a page or two and making up everything else out of whole cloth.

I'll be sending more copies of IR to the science fiction reviewer. Hopefully we'll get a better review, or at least a fair one in the next issue of F5. All in all, the review isn't really that much of a problem; it doesn't seem likely that that many gamers read Factsheet 5. But I must say that I was very surprised to discover such shoddy and unprofessional journalism in a nationally distributed magazine.

## The First Interregnum Sampler

With this issue, we reach our half-year mark. It seems only appropriate to think of future expansion. Actually, it *always* seems appropriate to think of expansion. ☺

One good way to increase circulation could be to distribute promotional material at conventions. I'm working on a new flier for IR; it should be enclosed in the next issue (and while I'm on the subject, if anyone would like to suggest text for the flier I'm all ears...). However, I'd like to distribute something a little more solid; something to give new readers a real introduction to the magazine.

Therefore, I'd like to make up an Interregnum sampler. This would be a slim special issue featuring some of the most interesting and notable material to appear in IR, along with (perhaps) some special material written just for that issue. A large number of copies will be run off and stored; as time goes by they will be distributed to various conventions. New samplers will be made up, perhaps at yearly intervals.

The sampler won't be available at the usual promotional sites at all. It will be available only to subscribers and at conventions. Possibly a specially bound copy will be available to contributors.

What's needed is for writers to decide which of their works they'd like to include in the sampler. Of course no one need participate if they don't want to! I'd also be interested in the feedback of the readership. Which articles are your favorites? Drop me a line and let me know what you'd like to see.

## An Electronic Interregnum

I've spoken of this before, but it seems to be a good time to take some action. While monthly distribution of an electronic version of IR is probably more work than I can handle, an Interregnum sampler on the Internet would probably be a good idea. Again, I'll need the help of contributors on this: the best thing to do would be to pick out a piece or two and email them to me. I'll take care of the formatting. Unfortunately it's beyond my capabilities to encode a document containing artwork, and in any case such a document would be incredibly huge. Therefore, the electronic file will be in ASCII form, with (alas!) no art. Unless any techno-wizards out there would care to help...

Until next month!

—>Pete

# The Interregnum FAQsheet

**Interregnum** is a monthly Amateur Press Association comprised of individual zines written and formatted by various authors and mailed to the editor for collation, reproduction, and binding. The primary focus is roleplaying games, fantasy, and science fiction, but diversity is valued—authors may write about anything they wish. **Interregnum** is written by mature gamers who necessarily have other subjects of interest beyond roleplaying games. It is hoped that the inclusion of such subjects will produce interesting insights into the roleplaying hobby.

**Subscriptions:** There is no fixed subscription period. Subscribers should mail a check or money order in US funds payable to Peter Maranci to establish an account; as issues are mailed the cost of the issue and the postage used to mail it will be deducted from the account. When the account gets low the amount left will be noted on the mailing envelope. At that point the subscriber may send more money to continue receiving issues, put their account on hold until some future time, or have the balance returned (at the editor's option, a final issue may be mailed instead to close out accounts in which the balance is less than the cost of one issue).

The usual cost per issue is \$2 plus postage. Due to special circumstances the cost has been lowered to \$1 per issue plus postage. Please note that when and/or if the special deal lapses we will return to the original rate.

**Postage:** Within the United States 1st class mail for the average issue of **Interregnum** costs \$1.67, while book rate (4th class) costs \$1.05. Subscribers may choose which method of mailing they prefer. Overseas subscribers may choose any method of mailing available from the US Postal Service.

**Sample Issues:** Sample issues may be obtained by mailing a check or money order for \$3 if the issue is to be mailed within the United States. A sample issue mailed outside the US is \$4 in US funds.

**Writing for Interregnum:** Anyone is welcome to write for **IR**. Since **Interregnum** is an amateur publication, not for profit, contributors help defray the cost of photocopying their zines. The cost is normally \$2 per single-sided page. However, the special circumstances noted above have made it possible to reduce the cost to \$1 per page. Contributors are not charged for a copy of the issue they write in—their only additional cost is postage.

Alternatively contributors may mail in 330+ copies of their zine, printed double-sided to reduce mailing costs. Zines mailed via UPS or any other private delivery service should be sent "no signature required".

**Format:** Zines must be clean and sharp enough to photocopy well. Desktop publishing is not required; zines may be typed, or even handwritten. Margins should be at least 1/2 inch wide on the top, bottom, and outer edges; a one-inch margin should be used for the binding edge (the left side for odd-numbered pages, right side for even-numbered pages). Internal art enhances readability and is always appreciated, as are multiple columns and subheads.

**Content:** Contributors are free to write as they wish, almost totally free of editorial oversight. I ask only that nothing be included which could lead to legal difficulties; please keep in mind that **Interregnum** is shipped across state lines and overseas, and is distributed in game stores which are open to all ages.

**Copyright:** All zines should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted through the following phrase: Copyright (Your Name) (Date) or © (Your Name) (Date). (c) is not a valid designation.

Copyrighted and trademarked material is often discussed in **Interregnum**. Discussion of such material is not intended as a challenge to any copyright or trademark.

**Emailing Zines:** Zines in ASCII form may be emailed to the editor via the InterNet for DTP formatting, or sent in on 3.5" or 5.25" DOS-compatible floppy disks. Since time is limited (and becomes tighter as collation looms), ASCII zines sent in for layout should arrive at least four days before the deadline for printed zines. I'll attempt to capture the style of the contributor, if I have a sample of previous work and enough time. I can also accept files created with Publish-It for DOS or Windows or PostScript files on 3.5 or 5.25" disks.

Email/disk contributors may choose to have their zines laser-printed; in that case the cost of the printing will be charged to their account (\$0.50 per page plus the cost of rental time if necessary—not more than a total of \$1 per page). Alternatively zines can be printed on a 24-pin dot matrix printer at no additional charge.

**Letters to the Editor** will be gladly received, and printed in the editorial section. No letter will be published, however, that is marked "not for publication".

**Back Issues:** Back issues are available while supplies last. Issues #1-3 cost \$2 each in US funds, plus the cost of postage. Subsequent issues are available at \$1 + postage. Some savings in postage costs may be realized by shipping several issues at once.

**Distribution:** A limited number of free promotional copies of *Interregnum* are distributed at selected game stores and other sites. If you're interested in distributing free copies of *IR*, please contact the editor.

Please note that as the number of distributors increases (and it has been doing so, steadily) the number of promotional copies available for each site will necessarily decrease. Furthermore, production of promotional copies may be reduced or eliminated without warning. Only paying subscribers can be sure to receive all issues of *IR*. Paying subscribers receive their issues weeks or even months in advance of promotional distribution. Finally, only paying subscribers will receive special mailings of bonus material, should any occur. In other words, the Editor strongly urges readers of the promotional copies to subscribe. ☺

**Net Connection:** An InterNet alias has been set up which allows correspondents to receive information and updates about the status of *Interregnum*. Anyone who would like to be on that list should send email to [maranci@max.tiac.net](mailto:maranci@max.tiac.net) and include a valid InterNet address.

## **Glossary:**

RPG: Role Playing Game

*IR*: *Interregnum*. You're soaking in it.

*TWH*: *The Wild Hunt*, an old and respected APA based in the Greater Boston area. A number of *Interregnum* contributors have written for *TWH*, or still do.

*A&E*: *Alarums and Excursions*, a slightly older APA based on the West Coast.

RQ: *RuneQuest*™, a roleplaying system played by a number of contributors to *Interregnum*.

AD&D™: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*™, a roleplaying system

LARP or LRP: Live Action Role Playing (game); a generic term

PBEM: Play By Email

BTW: By The Way

IMHO: In My Humble Opinion

RAEBNC: Read And Enjoyed But No Comment. An acronym commonly used by procrastinating contributors. 8^>}

CD-ROM: Compact Disk, Read Only Memory. Laser disks for computer which hold huge amounts of data. Many high-quality computer games are released on CD-ROM.

:) : a smile, indicating that the text preceding is not to be taken entirely seriously

8^>} : The cynical smile of a bearded, bespectacled editor

# FREE LOG THAT FITS

## #6

© Peter Maranci September 1994

81 Washington St., #2  
Malden, MA 02148

home: (617) 397-7958  
InterNet: maranci@max.tiac.net

Premiering in this issue is a new feature: "The Gaming News" (parenthetically, if anyone can think of a better title, please send it in). Scandal and gossip have always been a part of the roleplaying hobby; Different Worlds magazine used to cover the subject extremely well in the "Letter From Gigi" column, long since lapsed (along with the magazine, unfortunately). "The Gaming News" will carry news and rumors of all the latest outrages and scandals of roleplaying.

"The Gaming News" will run whenever there's sufficient material to warrant it. Readers are welcome to send in material for the column, anonymously if they wish. Any material for "The Gaming News" will be much appreciated.

## The Gaming News

### TSR™ vs the Net

Possibly the biggest roleplaying story of the year is TSR's decision to clamp down on the distribution of fan-created material over the Internet. Gamers have distributed original roleplaying material over the Net for years, for

many game systems. The various RPG newsgroups are all extremely popular, serving as a forum for fans to post amateur scenarios, plot hooks, new character types, alternate rules, campaign writeups, and much more. Admittedly much of this is in rather chaotic form (particularly compared to the handsome and organized APA format ☺), but the sheer volume is enormous.

A great deal of game material is archived for Internet users at various FTP (File Transfer Protocol) sites. These are available to all Net users free of charge. Since AD&D™ is the most widely played system, it's likely that the majority of archived material is for that game.

It seems that until recently TSR was not aware of the existence of this AD&D™ material on the Internet; or perhaps they were aware of it, but underwent a change in corporate philosophy. In any case, TSR released an announcement on the Net just after Labor Day announcing major new restrictions. They have written to a number of FTP sites, requesting them to remove all files which includes reference to TSR-copyrighted material. They claim that such material can no longer be freely distributed on the Net. Instead it



must be uploaded to a single FTP site, controlled by TSR. Every file must include a TSR-supplied disclaimer.

Since the posts by the TSR representative on the Net have been copyrighted, I cannot quote the exact wording here. However, the disclaimer states that the text attached is based upon or derivative of the copyrights of TSR, and that it may only be published through TSR and its representatives. This seems to give incredible power to TSR. It also indicates that TSR considers material posted on the Internet to be "published".

In fact, it turns out that TSR's standards are even more bizarre than could be expected. They consider conversation about games to be permissible, but only if logs of these conversations are not made available to the Net at large. TSR apparently also considers the words "armor class" and "hit dice" to be among their copyrighted properties. Interestingly, they also include "Drow" among their copyrights, although Webster's Dictionary lists the Drow as being a race of elves from Scottish mythology.

Ominously, the TSR representative has stated that any attempt by an author to copyright a work which includes a reference to a TSR copyright is void. There's no way to know exactly what TSR means by this, but one possible conclusion could be that TSR may consider any scenario or supplement which includes even a single use of a TSR-derived copyright to be unprotected by copyright law.

The posts from TSR have been somewhat uncoordinated, but have covered a multitude of issues. Disturbingly, they have repeated several

times that they intend to supply game material over the Net; given TSR's corporate (rapacious) history, it seems likely that they intend to find some way to make a profit from Net material. The severe restrictions placed on amateur material on the Net have led some to speculate that TSR might eventually restrict distribution to pay systems only.

TSR has also indicated that they may consider some or all MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons, interactive computer games on the Net) to be in violation of their copyrights. Since the word on the street is that TSR is developing a MUD of their own, it would not be surprising if they were to try to eliminate potential competitors before entering the field. SPI comes to mind. For those unfamiliar with the SPI incident: a number of years ago TSR destroyed SPI, a popular game company, through some apparently legal but extremely unethical behavior.



Other disturbing points: The TSR rep has stated that some sort of editorial standard will be applied to material at the sole Net site. Since TSR has one of the most restrictive publishing codes in the business, this bodes ill for freedom of expression on the Net, at least as far as AD&D goes.

In one case, the TSR rep seemed to actually threaten

an angry Net customer with legal action, warning him to talk to his lawyer before making any more "logical leaps".



There's been a great deal of anger among the gamers on the Net over the TSR announcements. At least some of them have announced plans to give up roleplaying as a result of TSR's high-handed behavior. It's unfortunate that the arrogance of one company should push gamers out of the hobby altogether, when there are so many other companies that treat their customers with respect.

All in all, TSR's handling of this matter has been rather inept. They've don't seem to understand the basic culture of the Net, viewing it instead as simply another market. Their bungling has caused much angry discussion over the last few days. None of this makes TSR look good. It seems quite possible that TSR may find itself losing more than it gains from this ill-advised affair...time will tell.



### TSR vs. the Game Press

I'd hate to have anyone think that I was out to "get" TSR—but honestly, they're actually *doing* this stuff.

In issue #9 of The World Builder RPG magazine, the editor reports that he is unable to publish a column about TSR products. The reason? He claims that TSR has written a letter to a number of game magazines ordering them not to publish any sort of TSR-related material apart from product reviews. No scenarios, character types, plot hooks, new spells...nothing. Taken together with TSR's new Net policy, an ominous picture seems to be taking form.

### The Two Steves

My thanks to Steve Jackson for his permission to use the Net announcement printed below. I asked Steven Wieck, the other major participant in the disagreement, for permission to reprint his reply to the post; he did not answer my request, and so his response is not included here.

-----  
Subject: SJ Flames White Wolf For  
Bad-Faith Behavior

Date: 2 Aug 1994 23:17:37

Summary: we're mad as hell and we're not going to take it any more.

(If you dislike long semi-flames that reveal unfair dealings in the game business, mutual contempt between hobby personalities, and so on, this posting will not interest you.

I'm posting this only to rec.games.frp, and to the Illuminati Online conference io.games.sjg.gurps. I have no objection to its being reposted elsewhere, if this is being discussed elsewhere.)

Where's GURPS MAGE? What's going on between SJ Games and White Wolf? There have been a lot of questions. There have been denials from a WW employee and a non-employee "friend," who couldn't give any details but assured everyone that nothing was wrong. I've held off commenting on the net. But Steve Wieck, the president of White Wolf, has deliberately ignored every fax and message I've sent him, now, for more than a month. I caught him on the phone today—he called someone else at my office, and I just picked it up and said "Hi, Steve . . ." After talking to him, I don't think the relationship between the companies can GET any worse, so there's no reason not to tell my customers what's happening.

Steve says that he “didn’t think it was worth his while” to return any of my faxes or calls. This, despite the fact that the reason he called my office today was to personally demand a \$15 late fee on the \$1,000 check we just sent them for VAMPIRE COMPANION. Fifteen dollars. Important use of his time. Right.

When I asked him, specifically, why it wasn’t worth his while to return any of my messages, he told me that he had spent enough hours talking with me already, and that he was satisfied with that, and with a fax they sent me on June 3. I replied (not exact quote) “Steve, my fax asks a couple of specific questions, and asks you to confirm in writing some things you told me over the phone. Since you have told me so many times that we have “misunderstood” your verbal approvals, it’s not very cooperative of you to refuse a written confirmation when we ask for one.” His reply (exact quote, I stopped to write it down) was that he was “content to sit back” without replying to any of my questions, and that we had “lost it” when I called him a liar . . .

“Lost it,” eh? Verrrrrry professional, Mr. Wieck. This is the way a REAL company president acts, don’t you think?

Flashback; let’s fill in some background.

Apparently SJ Games won the “I Slept With WHO??” award, at this year’s Silver Hatchet Ceremony at Origins, for making a deal with White Wolf in the first place. I can’t argue . . .

There have been many, many problems with White Wolf since we started doing GURPS versions of their books, and one of the worst boils down to: White Wolf changes the ground rules on us, over and

over, and always in ways that hamstringing our adaptations.

Some examples: When we first signed the deal, they told us that we could do “place” sourcebooks - Chris McCubbin did some good preliminary work on “Texas By Night.” Then they changed their minds.

When we turned in the VAMPIRE COMPANION text, they refused to approve the adventure. The reason they gave was that it was set in a city and “they might want to use that city someday.” So we published the book without the adventure.

When we first signed the deal, we agreed, verbally, that—since we could only do one follow-on sourcebook for each of the five main World of Darkness titles—we would do “sampler” sourcebooks that took interesting sections from different White Wolf releases. This would give us a good book that didn’t duplicate any of theirs, and would whet the appetites of the GURPS fans, increasing White Wolf sales. But later, Steve Wieck said “You can’t do that. We want you to pick just one of our supplements for each title, and adapt it.”

From these and other problems, we saw that it would be prudent of us to get White Wolf’s approval on each books’ OUTLINE, so no time or work was wasted. They approved the outlines for both MAGE and WEREWOLF COMPANION.

We had a problem with the MAGE cover. Initially we wanted to use the same cover design they did: big gold letters, and a tarot card on a dark cloth background. It’s a great design. We contracted John Zeleznik to paint a new card, so it wouldn’t look too much like theirs. But WW said they would not approve any card John painted. They insisted that we use their card artist, or not do a card at all. The reason? “To keep consistency within the

line." We pointed out that GURPS MAGE was not part of their line, and some distinction was a good idea. But no, Steve Wieck said that we had to use their artist or not do a card.

Then, researching Tarot design, we came to THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TAROT, by Stuart R. Kaplan (Volume I, 6th printing, 1988). After examining its dramatic and original cover design, we decided that perhaps gold letters and tarot cards on a rich cloth background were not what we wanted for our book, after all. We did an entirely different cover. (We did not discuss the reason for our change with White Wolf - we thought it would only lead to further upset. But it sheds an interesting light on their attitude about the "originality" of our MAGE manuscript.)

So we thought we had all the MAGE problems ironed out. But when the final, laid-out MAGE pages went in, WW rejected it. Initially, the line editor, Phil Brucato, complimented the book. But then he sent us a letter, saying the book was rejected because - and I quote from Phil's 6-3-94 letter - "I cannot approve a book that reprints so much of our own copyrighted material."

This led to some long, stressed phone conversations. We pointed out that at the beginning of the very first project, GURPS VAMPIRE, they had surprised us by requiring that we write new chapter-intro vignettes. "Mark Rein-Hagen doesn't want his stories re-used." So Jeff Koke wrote all new vignettes, and they're very good. But Jeff and Mark had gone over the whole VAMPIRE book to decide which non-rules sections could be copied, and which would have to be rewritten from scratch. Wasn't it unfair, we asked, to change the rules after MAGE was finished, when we'd done just

what Mark Rein-Hagen had personally supervised on VAMPIRE?

Well, no. They didn't think it was relevant. Steve Wieck didn't want to admit that any instructions we had had from Mark Rein-Hagen affected the current question at all.

Jeff Koke and I pointed out that ALL our previous books had made extensive use of material from their White Wolf originals . . . that was the point of the license. "Not this much," was the reply. True. They'd been vetoing originality right and left, and approving duplicated material. MAGE contained more duplication than the earlier books, and with less internal editing by our writer; the MAGE disks they sent us were much more cleanly written than the sources they supplied for earlier books.

We pointed out that the contract **REQUIRES** White Wolf to supply us with the complete text of their books on computer disk, and they had done this for every book, including MAGE. "That's just for your reference," we were told. (And sure enough, the contract doesn't actually say we can **USE** any part of that computer text as it is, does it? It just says they have to supply it.)

We reminded them of incidents in which they had demanded that we follow their wording exactly. Apparently that was then, though, and this was now.

We pointed out that Bob Schroeck had discussed with Phil Brucato, the line editor, **EXACTLY** which parts of his outline would be rewritten and which parts would use the MAGE text. "Oh, that was a misunderstanding."

We pointed out that Steve Brown was hard at work compiling **WEREWOLF COMPANION**, and that he was following the exact

same procedure. In fact, we'd chosen him, with White Wolf's approval, BECAUSE he had written so much of the original WEREWOLF material. "Oh. Well, that's under a different editor. And that's a misunderstanding, too. He'll have to rewrite it all, too."

We asked if, since they wanted our book to be different from their MAGE, we could develop some minor new material . . . some new Rotes, some new Paradox Spirits. Phil Brucato liked that idea at first, when he and I were talking. But later, with Steve Wieck on the line, Phil "explained" that it would "not be in the best interest of Steve Jackson Games" to include any new creations at all. "Not in the best interests of Steve Jackson Games?" There's a triumph of doublespeak.

I confess that I used the word "weasel" a number of times during that very last conversation, but at least it was always as a verb, and not as a noun.

We even offered, since they were so concerned about "their words," to change the cover credits of GURPS MAGE to mirror those of the original MAGE. I had Bob Schroeck's permission to make this offer. In fact, he welcomed it; he didn't think he should be credited as "author," but just as "GURPS adaptation by." But Steve Wieck rejected this compromise too.

And in the end, we had no good choices. We could violate the license and publish without approval, or we could take them to court and ask a judge to provide adult supervision. Or we could drop the whole project. Or we could rewrite the manuscripts.

So we started rewriting. GURPS MAGE didn't make Origins. We didn't have an Origins release at all. I asked Steve Wieck

if he cared about this. "No," he said. "We don't have an Origins release, either," he said.

No, I really don't know what is happening here. But since that last MAGE call, more than a month ago, in which Steve Wieck also said that all further discussion had to go directly through him, I've faxed him three times asking for clarification IN WRITING of some of the things he required, and WRITTEN confirmation of some things that he said—on the phone—would and would not be acceptable. (No, I wasn't recording that call, either.)

The fax went out first on June 30. Then on July 6. I got sick and missed a lot of work—so the next one didn't go out until July 21. No answer. Since then, I've been phoning . . . over and over. But I didn't get an answer until I surprised him by picking up the phone when he called someone else . . . and then the answer I got was that he wouldn't answer.

The next time a GURPS MAGE manuscript goes to White Wolf, it will be even better than the last one . . . the one that Phil Brucato said, on first reading, was "better than their version." There will be no quality issue. There will also be no issue of "using their words." If Steve Wieck never answers my questions, I'll just go by what he told me on the phone, on that call I wasn't recording, and we'll see if he's set me up for yet another "misunderstanding" and another delay of the book.

Current employees of White Wolf toe the party line without explaining, or keep silent. The calls and mail that I get from WW refugees, concerned about this issue, indicate that they think White Wolf will approve another manuscript for us when hell freezes over. Steve Wieck, a month ago, angrily denied that he'd ever given orders to

reject any manuscript before it came in, and told me that OF COURSE I couldn't believe anything I was told by anyone White Wolf had fired. "I don't lie!" he said loudly. "I don't tell lies!" He also asked, repeatedly, if I was recording the call...

It would be nice to believe that White Wolf wants these books to come out, and wants them to be good. But Steve Wieck told me, months ago, that he wished this license had never been granted. (No, I wasn't recording him, but I believe him.) There sure weren't any congratulations from Atlanta when GURPS VAMPIRE won the Origins Award this year.

The instructions that we now have from WHITE WOLF **\*\*seem\*\*** to boil down to: Base each of your books exactly on one of ours. Don't put in anything new. Except for the vignettes, which have to be new. But make all the descriptive sections the same. But don't use any of "their words." In other words, make everything completely the same, but make it all different.

But it's hard to know what the instructions really are, since the president of the company insists we talk only to him, then won't answer our questions or put his own statements in writing, and justifies it by saying he's offended that I "called him a liar."

(Now you're asking: Did I really call Steve Wieck a liar? Well, I sure put his nose out of joint. We were on the phone. He made a couple of very self-serving remarks, with the stilted, repeated phrasing and the tone of voice that I last heard from the Secret Service guys as they lied about raiding us. I pointed out that what he said didn't mesh with facts I possessed. He stormed "I don't like being called a liar." I was amazed. All I could say was "Don't lie, then." In my experience, the louder

someone tells you they're honest, the more you have to watch them. Honest people just don't lie, and everyone notices. Their reputations take care of themselves. On the other hand, sometimes a cool black shirt covers a really thin skin.)

\*\*\*\*\*

ASIDE: Personal to Steve Wieck, President and apparently God-King at White Wolf Game Studios . . .

Steve, here's a personal challenge, which I expect you will ignore. You told me today that White Wolf would give us no cooperation on this contract, and make every possible demand on us, because you, President Steve, got your feelings hurt. You gave me some really lame doubletalk, I challenged you, and this is how you're getting even. No, that's not a quote - I wasn't recording you - so don't weasel me on the words you used. That's what you meant, and you made sure there was no misunderstanding. You let me know this was payback, and I believe you were telling the truth, right then. Will you admit it in public?

In fact, Steve, if you can explain your behavior of the last two months without either lying like a rug, or admitting that you've been petty, jealous, childish and unprofessional, I will be damned impressed.

\*\*\*\*\*

We'll see. Maybe White Wolf will approve the rewritten manuscript, in which case everyone will see a very good, clear, playable, well-organized, well-illustrated GURPS MAGE. Maybe they'll wait the full 20 days, and reject it with another surprising demand for changes. Either way, you'll hear—from us—exactly what happens.

I don't expect this posting to make Steve Wieck like me any better. I expect he'll get red in the face and gobble. But then, I don't think that the Archangel Michael could make Steve Wieck like me any better. I can live with that.

The point is that we won't bear this in silence. We won't mislead people by saying that everything's all right, and we won't let White Wolf get away with it either. Our distributors, and our retailers, and our players, will know exactly how White Wolf treats us in exchange for the thousands of dollars of our money - **OF YOUR MONEY** - that have already gone into their coffers on this licensing deal. (And we're about to write them yet another big check.)

GURPS MAGE is a damn good book, whether it's ever published or not. I hope you get to see it someday. If not, at least you'll get a play-by-play description of the professional way White Wolf is working with us.

-----

And that's Steve Jackson's complete announcement. As I mentioned above, Steve Wieck didn't respond to my email requesting permission to print his response. However, that's not the reason that I'll say that I can agree with many other Netters concerning Mr. Wieck's response. It was little more than "PR-speak". His major point seemed to be that he didn't feel that it was appropriate or businesslike to discuss this issue in a public forum. He also urged gamers to check around the industry for an accurate assessment of both his and Steve Jackson's character.

Let me say here that I have no real axe to grind in this matter. I don't play GURPS, though I do have a few GURPS products; likewise, I don't play White Wolf games, though I did buy some copies of their magazine

several years ago. My only real involvement with either party was with a Stewart Wieck several years ago. He was then the editor of White Wolf magazine, and gave me quite a lot of grief over an article (see Interregnum #1, "Bar Wars"). But that was long ago, and in any case I must assume that Stewart Wieck and Steven Wieck are two different people (though something tells me that that they might be related...☺).

I can report that in the responses on the Net a number of folk spoke from personal experience with the major figures involved. They were virtually unanimous in their praise of Steve Jackson, and several spoke rather strongly against Steve Wieck and White Wolf. For what that's worth.



### TOPIC: HUMOR HE WHO LAUGHS LAST...

I could write an article on the philosophy of humor in gaming, I suppose. I could say that there's not enough in most campaigns, but that too much can really screw up a deep-roleplaying campaign. Why bother? Here's a funny story.

It was a Paranoia module, which shouldn't be a surprise. I was the party's technician. I'd been issued a laser drill to fix a damaged 'bot. Unfortunately the laser drill projected a beam six feet long, and my first step in repairing the 'bot

was to take off the screws of the access plate. The laser drill was not well-suited for unscrewing. *Vaporizing* screws would get the cover off, but that would be Damage to Computer Property—and the rest of the team was just panting for an excuse to blow me away, as I was the only PC not to die yet. I stood there with the drill. The moment dragged on. And when I couldn't stall any longer, I yelled:

"Help! Mutant Commies are mind-controlling me!", and whipped that six-foot laser drill around into the party. Sliced a bunch of them in half before they got me, too. ☺

## The World's Shortest RuneQuest Scenario

### Introduction/Glossary for those unfamiliar with Glorantha:

**Storm Bull:** The god of berserk Chaos-fighting. His worshippers are violent, brutal, bloody, cruel, mindless, berserk, psychotic, and stupid—and those are their good points. They don't know the meaning of the words "retreat" or "fear". Actually, they don't know the meaning of most words. ☺

**Sense Chaos:** A special skill possessed by Storm Bull worshippers. When followers of the Storm Bull sense Chaos, they become berserk killing machines—or rather, they become *active* berserk killing machines.

Note that in RuneQuest, an attempt to use a skill may be a critical success (meaning that the skill-user does exceptionally well) or a fumble (the worst possible result).

I. Characters: All players begin as Initiates of Storm Bull. There are no NPCs.

II. Setting: The players have been told of a large hidden store of beer in a cave. As the

game begins, they have entered the cavern in which the beer is supposed to be hidden. There is only one entrance to the cave.

III. Action! All the characters immediately fumble their Sense Chaos ability. The fun begins.

IV. OPTIONAL: If one of the PCs survives the battle, he eventually finds and drinks the beer. Unfortunately it is Troll beer, highly poisonous to humans (particularly injured ones). The PC must resist a poison with a potency of 30 or die.

V. Epilogue (optional): The NPC Trickster who gave the PCs the map to the beer comes by later to have a good laugh and pick up any saleable items from the bodies.

## I Wonder Why

I've been talking about running a new campaign for ages. I even got to the point where I had the setting, the basic plot structure, the character types, the party genesis, the map, about 50 plot hooks and the advertising for players all ready to go. That was about a year ago. For some reason, the game stalled at that point before I even began gathering players.

It's finally time to begin the campaign. I'm rather pleased with the flyer I made up for it, so I'm including it here, at the end of my zine. But I can't help but wonder if it's overkill as far as advertising for a campaign goes—after all, we're not talking about a game system or any sort of tangible product. Still, one of the major problems that I've faced as an adult roleplayer is getting intelligent, sane, and imaginative new players. It seems that everyone and their brother considers themselves a "deep" roleplayer, but too often that seems to mean that they say a quick prayer before looting their comrades' bodies (and *that's* usually just to appease their god/GM). ☺

I'm hoping that the Wonder flyer will bring in a better class of gamer. Hmm. In a way, this could

almost be a case study of roleplaying recruitment. I'll report the response, if it's interesting.

## COMMENTS #5

**Doug Jorenby:** Regarding the art forms which could be compared to roleplaying, the process of *creating* a script for theater, TV, or film might resemble RPGs much more than finished product. Particularly when such scripts are produced by a team of writers.

Perhaps the key question is one of perspective. To an outside observer, a good roleplaying campaign might most closely resemble a continuing TV show such as Hill Street Blues, or (shudder) a soap opera. To the players, the closest analogy might be that of improvisational theater. Is any other viewpoint possible?

• Here's an idea: perhaps the best artistic analogy to roleplaying would be that of a conductor and symphony.

• Your definition of conflict is very broad. I suspect that Conflict will be a topic in **IR** before very long.

• Ah, Bakshi's Lord of the Rings movie. It's been a while since I thought of that abomination. I remember when I first saw it with a friend: we were stunned by the sheer incompetence of it. When the live-action figures became visible under the Rotoscoping, we groaned. And when the movie was over, without even glancing at each other, we both stood up and screamed "THAT SUCKED!!!" ☹

### George Phillies:

Glad to hear that another novel is in the works. I'm intrigued by the many publishers you've mentioned—how did you find all these companies? Have you considered getting an agent?

I've been told that it's much easier to get an agent for a novel if you've already had at least one short story published in a prozine. *Who Slays Satan* certainly deserves to be published in a prozine in any case—have you submitted it anywhere?

**Gil Pili:** Beautiful art, Gil. Top-quality stuff. I'd be tempted to sign up with America Online (which, if I

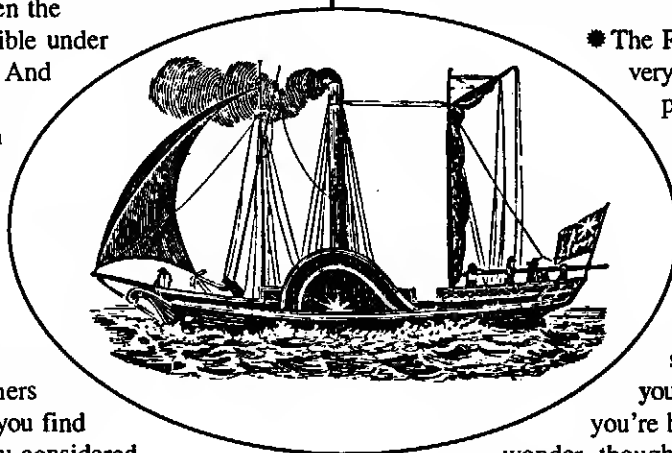
recall, is your source) if I didn't hate hourly charges so much.

• I may have a sick sense of humor, but I have to admit that I LOled at "Die, old people!" There are times when I've been stuck behind some insane octogenarian at 3 MPH that I've been strongly tempted to yell much the same thing...

• Your analysis of alignment was very good. One of the biggest problems with the concept is that it's simply too vague. Different GMs choose wildly different interpretations. I recall the time I played a Lawful Good Half-Orc cleric of a gentle Forest Goddess. Before I began an adventure with (among others) a Lawful Good Elf-Prince, the orc king (GM) called me in and commanded me to slay the elf. I refused, of course, and was informed by the GM that I'd lose permanent characteristic points every day that I didn't kill the elf. I objected, of course. Why would the goddess punish me for following my creed of Good, and not obeying the orders of the evil king? "Because he's your king, and you're lawfully bound to obey him" replied the GM.

I don't think too many people would agree with that interpretation of alignment. ☺

**Curtis Taylor:** Re your comment to Doug, I have to ask: what's a POG?



• The RuneQuest character sheet was very interesting, though personally I prefer the linear tracking method of hit point recording. It sounds as if you played that character for a long time?

• Though the ubiquity of **Magic: The Gathering** has sometimes put me on edge, you do have a good point; if you're having fun, it's worth doing. I wonder, though, when the fad will crest and fade. Any opinions?

In that vein, I wonder if **Jyhad** and **Spellfire: Master the Copyright™®©** are cutting into sales of **Magic**. If anyone has any solid information, I'd like to hear about it.

**Andrew Howes:** Welcome to **Interregnum** Andrew! I enjoyed your zine very much. Did you draw the art? It's very expressive, and gives the zine a nicely different quality. Good stuff.



• The articles were lively and interesting—and a refreshing change of pace. I'll admit that I didn't guess why the characters killed the farmers rather than the chasee. Have you read the "Bar Wars" article in *IR* #1? It was party-forming of the type that you describe that drove me to write that.

• Re "...some game systems actually reward the good side of human nature"—how about some examples? Is this any more valid than rewarding evil? I'm tempted to suggest that a morally neutral GM might be preferable, but that would be facile. The moral stance of the referee is part of the "art" of the game, and as such can vary greatly. Unfortunately too many GMs give no conscious thought to their moral position as game arbiter.

That might seem a little vague. Let me explain: I'm thinking of *The Lord of the Rings*. That was a world with a clear underlying morality of Good and Evil. That moral basis provided the essential structure of the work; it's hard to imagine *TLOFR* without that quality of morality. *JRR Tolkien's* religious background must have been a major influence on the books, though unlike *C.S. Lewis* he seems to have been focused on art rather than preaching.

On the other hand, many modern roleplaying games seem to operate from a nineteenth-century laissez-faire standard: "Get all you can while the getting is good, to the victor goes the spoils". Hmm. There's an article in this, I think; one might well compare PCs in that type of game to the Robber-Barons. They seem quite heedless of the ecological havoc they cause. No concern of safety seems to apply to NPC employees. In the end, it's each man for himself—not necessarily an invalid moral basis for a game (artistically speaking), but it *has* rather been done to death.

**Dale Meier:** Welcome to *IR*! An excellent beginning. I was glad to see the material on Cyberpunk, though I don't play the genre myself; it was well written, very interesting. Excellent job on the adventure hooks.

• Regarding *White Wolf*, I suspect you've opened up quite a can of worms. But that's all to the good. I'd planned on writing an article or two on the points you

raised, but must put it off for an issue or two. It's an odd example of synchronicity that the *SJ Games vs White Wolf* situation should surface in this issue, I think. In any case, I'm sure that you'll get quite a few responses to your essay...



• Perhaps Religion will be a topic in an upcoming *IR*.

• Have you read many of the *White Wolf* supplements in question? When a local game store banned *Clan Brujah* on the recommendation of their distributor, I immediately went out and bought a copy. I react that way to censorship—yes, I know the term might not exactly apply, but in any case I consider such restrictions to be equivalent in kind. After all, in either case the result is that I can't read or

buy what I like (and parenthetically, the store owner who made the decision to return the product had never read it, and has probably never read *any* RPG material).

It's really pretty tame stuff. Nothing you couldn't see in a PG-13 movie, believe me. One or two uses of the word f-k, a sprinkling of lesser profanity, and a couple of paragraphs from the perspective of a Nazi vampire. As for the art, that too was mild compared to much that's in the movies: as I recall, there wasn't even a topless woman in it, which places it above quite a few other roleplaying products (including certain publications by the oh-so-moral TSR). The worst thing, if you can call it that, was a picture of a vampire skinhead giving the finger.

I'd say that *White Wolf* desperately *wants* its "bad boys of RPG" image. While TSR chose long ago to appeal to a early-teen audience, WW is going for the more rebellious mid-to-late teens. From my limited observation it does seem that many of those who play *White Wolf* games tend to be young (emotionally, if not physically), and to be somewhat...affected, in the sense that Holden Caulfield used the word. They put on an act. The purpose is to shock, shock their parents, the public, each other, etc.

Nonetheless, the WW supplements are surprisingly innocent. If sexual titillation is the goal, there are a lot of more effective sources available even to children—and I'm sure that those who are interested see all they want to.

• Regarding religious figures getting involved against RPGs, it's possible that we're looking at a geographic difference. I believe that there were some attempts by

various priests and ministers to ban or restrict RPGs in Massachusetts, but that was long ago—if there's any such activity going on here today, I haven't heard of it. I hadn't realized that the atmosphere was that much more restrictive in middle America; I've only been west of the Mississippi once, and that was during a visit to Detroit (where they have more serious problems). It would be interesting to hear more about the situation out there.

• As for the danger of gamers becoming involved with the “real” occult...I can't really speak to that meaningfully. I will say, though, that from the little material I've read the “occult” contents in almost all gaming material is spurious—obviously the product of a writer's imagination, rather than being based on the actual rites and beliefs of the Middle Ages. Of course, much of it is very bad art. But it seems to me that the harm is aesthetic and financial rather than spiritual. As to whether or not “real” spiritual harm is possible...that's a question best left for a later time (the deadline's coming up fast, and I'm chicken ☺).

Since I view gaming as an art form, I don't believe that the triumph of good over evil—or Good over Evil—is always the desired goal. Nor need PCs be always good (not they they are, anyway ☺). Tragedy and darkness have their place. Look at **George Orwell's 1984**; one of the darker works of English literature, and yet it's also one of the greatest. Most (probably all) “dark” roleplaying is on a much lower level, of course. It's true that most such games don't appeal to the best in human nature. But in my experience, neither do those games which purport to be “good”. In both types the major activity is fighting and killing, and the attitudes of the participants are much the same.

The vast majority of gaming is “low” art, I fear; the equivalent of car chases and barroom brawls. As such, it appeals to a sense of sensationalism. I can't believe that it can evoke any quality of human nature which wasn't already present and active to begin with.

**Scott Ferrier:** You started a puzzle-type campaign without knowing the solution, Scott? That's pretty brave (some would say foolhardy ☺).

• As a player in the “Bomb Shelters of the Holy” campaign (or at least for the first part of it), I must say that I was totally unaware of the world as you describe it. It's too bad—it would have been interesting to discover all that history.

Project “Steroid Stallion”?! ☺☺☺☺☺

**Virgil Greene:** Your analysis of the qualities likely to be possessed by intelligent species was very interesting.

I've heard it said that it's impossible to create an alien who is truly different from human beings—that any such creature will simply be a case of some human aspect enlarged beyond proportion. I'm not sure that's true, though obviously we won't know for certain until we meet real aliens. The question seems to come down to this: does intelligence have universal qualities, or not? Does human intelligence express itself in all possible ways, or are there truly alien qualities that our species cannot know?

I don't know.

**NESTLE**

Who knows? ☺

—>Pete



### COLOPHON

The *Log That Flies #6* was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30.4 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable villain word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

Most of the art in *TLTF* is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the **Dover Publishing Co.** of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a **Kodak 2110** high-speed duplicator.

If you've read this far, you're eligible for a valuable prize. ☺ —>Pete

*On a darkling plain, Someone is Dreaming...*

# WONDER

A different kind of fantasy roleplaying campaign.

**Wonder** is a world of wild magic and strange dreams. Quaint small kingdoms, unique cities, and curious Sultanates dot the landscape; rainbows may sometimes be climbed into the sky, leading to strange worlds and fabulous places. A real Underworld lies beneath your feet, dark and dangerous: there the dead go to wander in lightless stone halls and on sunless shores. In **Wonder** it's possible to simply Dream things into existence—though you may not get exactly what you expected...

**Wonder** draws on the older roots of fantasy, more primal and magical than the sometimes sterile and mechanistic fantasy of modern roleplaying games. The inspiration for **Wonder** is drawn from a number of sources: The fantasies of **Lord Dunsany**, the Dreamlands of **H. P. Lovecraft**, the works of James Branch **Cabell**, Rudyard **Kipling's** *Kim* and *The Jungle Books*, *A Thousand and One Nights*, and to a lesser extent from such sources as Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, the works of Cordwainer Smith, and many others. Knowledge of the works of these writers is by no means required, but familiarity with some of them would be likely to add to the enjoyment of the game (they're all well worth reading in any case).

Cultural elements from the Far and Middle East may be found in **Wonder**, along with more typical fantasy motifs. However, **Wonder** is in no way limited to any society, historical or otherwise, of Earth.

The main themes of **Wonder** are travel, exploration, adventure, and fun. A strong emphasis on

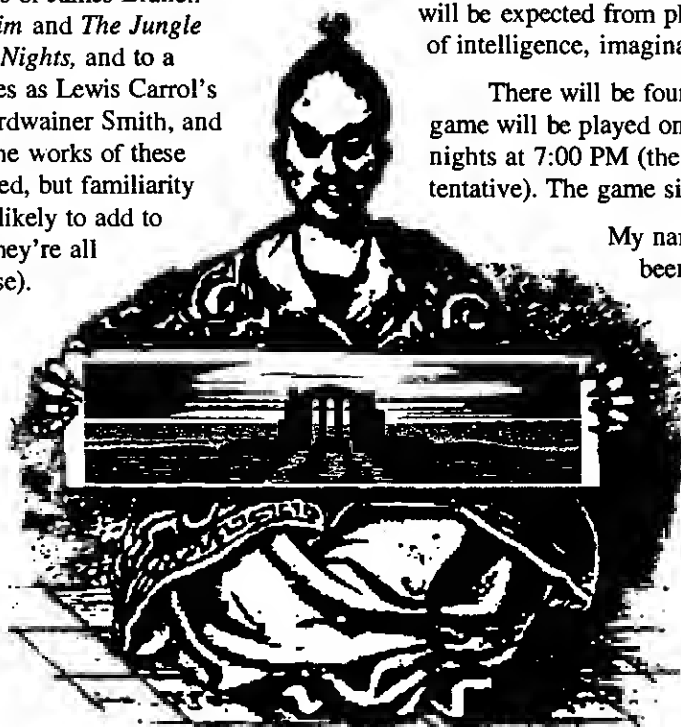
roleplaying and characterization will be key. Characters may come from a broad variety of backgrounds and professions, but are expected to be decent people at heart; internecine strife will not be a part of this game. Nor will world-saving. The usual assumptions of roleplaying games will not always apply! There will be relatively little combat in **Wonder**. Intelligent, and imaginative roleplaying will be the most important part of the game.

**Wonder** is an experimental fantasy roleplaying campaign. A highly simplified system of rules will be used for play. However, in many situations players may choose to describe their character actions rather than use the game system. Players with little or no previous experience with roleplaying games are very welcome in Wonder. A certain degree of maturity will be expected from players, as well as a measure of intelligence, imagination and flexibility.

There will be four to eight players. The game will be played once per week, on Tuesday nights at 7:00 PM (the day and time are tentative). The game site is easily accessible by T.

My name is Peter Maranci. I've been running deep-roleplaying and sheetless RPGs for more than ten years, as well as more conventional systems. I publish a monthly roleplaying APA called **Interregnum**.

For more information about **Wonder**, call (617) 397-7958 (please leave a message) or send email via the InterNet to [maranci@max.tiac.net](mailto:maranci@max.tiac.net).



# Session Notes #20

## Douglas E. Forenby



### L'Étranger

In *IR* #4, **David Hoberman** raised a number of interesting points about detailing cultures different from our own. In the same issue, **Virgil Greene** raised the question, "How do we play an alien character?" As I read the two zines, these two threads came together nicely, much as the macro- and micro-cosm of the same field. How *do* we deal with the alien, be it a character or a culture? In one sense, it's ironic to consider this. Much of the appeal of role playing comes from the encounter with the alien, be it fantasy races, the gibbering horrors of H. P. Lovecraft, galaxy-spanning empires, or superhuman powers. And yet, most of this alien-ness is superficial. It's window-dressing that helps highlight some very familiar aspect of social or personal organization.

On the cultural level, David points out that many RPG cultures are simply cheap rip-offs of previous Earth cultures. We could dub this the *Desilu Phenomenon* in honor of all those old *Star Trek* episodes where budget and costume constraints required yet another planet that paralleled Earth's cultural development ("My God, Jim! They're Romans with submachine guns and TV cameras!"). I think the series of questions he proposes are excellent guides to refs interested in creating their own cultures. My personal preference has usually been to take historical cultures in their historical context. It not only provides me with a firm base to work from, it also allows players (when motivated) to do some background research on their own.

The limitations to creating from scratch are even more apparent on the micro level. Many of Virgil's thoughts are relevant here. The examples that leap immediately to mind are the alien races from *Traveller*. Most of these races have been developed and refined over a period of many years of active gaming. Still, they tend to be exaggerated aspects of some Terran animal species that has been anthropomorphized. Hence, the Vargr -- canines in space, working in packs, yet constantly fighting amongst themselves to establish dominance. This is hardly creating from whole cloth. Yet, I don't think it's really possible to create from whole cloth. Whether we're talking about cultures or individuals, 20th Century human beings playing these imaginary entities need some sort of reality touchpoint to work from. It may be describing the internal politics of a "new" culture as being "Byzantine," or just setting a campaign in historical Byzantium. It may be emphasizing one or two "species" traits (such as curiosity and libido amongst primates) in developing a new species; exaggerations of traits that humans are familiar with.

**Literary Aside:** Joe Haldeman gave a nice example of this in *The Forever War*. The UNECG forces were unable to establish meaningful communication with the enemy (a collective consciousness) until a majority of the UNECG personnel were clones of the same individual.

I don't think it's possible to create something utterly alien to our experience. How would you describe it? How could characters interact with it? At best, it must make reference to something that people can at least conceptualize in real life. The potential weakness in all this is what David noted about cultures: they become feeble caricatures of the prototype. Because of my enjoyment for history, I have a particular dislike for sloppy design work that is excused by saying, "Well, see, it's kinda like 11th Century Norway.....but it's fantasy!" ☹ On the individual character level, this is even more striking. If players run characters that consist of one or two highly exaggerated traits, they become stereotypes of that species. Whether one is dealing with a single alien character or an entire culture, there is room for creativity and flair.

## Steam

*Give me steam  
And how you feel can make it real  
Real as any place you've been  
Get a life with the dreamer's dream*

-- Peter Gabriel

Once upon a time, it was called *Banana Slugs Go To Rio*. Over a year ago, the word was that it would be called *Castle Falkenstein*. Mike Pondsmith devoted an entire seminar at Gen Con 1993 just to previewing it. It was due to be released. Real Soon Now. *Pyramid* magazine gave its cover to a sneak preview late last year. It was coming in the fall. Then in time for the holiday season. Then in early February. Late February. April? May, for sure. Somewhere around this time, the helpful, friendly clerks at Pegasus Games would chime out, "No, it's not in. No, we don't know when," as soon as I walked in the door. I felt betrayed. Scorned. *Castle Falkenstein* was turning out to be the biggest piece of vapourware in gaming.

And then, on Monday, 15 August, the world changed.

I'm not even going to pretend to do an objective review of this game. I waited too long, and my expectations were too high. Was it worth it? I still wish it had come out last summer or fall, but in the end I'm glad R. Talsorian Games took their time and got it right. For US\$27.00, you get a 224 page perfect-bound book that is arguably the most handsome role-playing product I've ever seen. The first 128 pages are printed on glossy white stock, liberally strewn with a wide variety of art. When I say art, I don't mean the same subpar line drawings that



**Relativity:** The theory that time moves more slowly (relative to a fixed observer) when you are waiting for an overdue game release. ☺



**Limitations:** The problem, of course, with such great art is that I have nothing that comes close to it. ☹

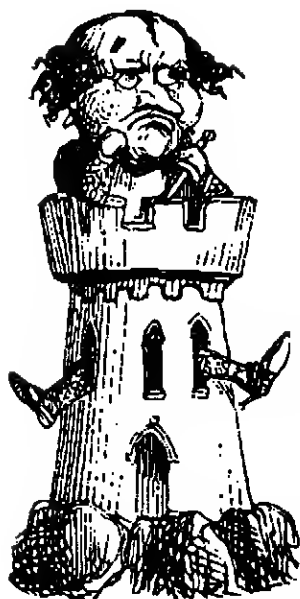
**New Math:** There are a few actual numbers involved here for the purposes of resolving Feats, but they're pretty trivial in the greater scheme of things. Much like Pondsmith's **Teenagers From Outer Space**, the focus is on the story to be told. In fact, I think **CF** actually has fewer mechanics than **TFOS**!

Steve Jackson Games has been recycling since the first printing of *GURPS*. We're talking pen & ink sketches, color charcoals, lithographs, full-page oils -- incredible stuff. I really liked the Nagel-esque work Sam Liu did in the original *Cyberpunk* set, but this is worlds beyond. It's no wonder that William Eaken was given co-credit for the work on the spine.

I'm not a big fan of off-the-shelf role-playing worlds, but *CF* is almost enough to make me a believer. Pondsmith uses the first 128 pages of the book to present what amounts to a novella (a sneaky way to get people to read all that background!). The frame is that a friend of his, a computer game artist, is pulled by a magickal spell from Neuschwanstein castle in Bavaria to Castle Falkenstein in Bayern, New Europa. Neuschwanstein has often been described as a "fairy castle" (and inspired the Magic Kingdom castle at Disneyland); in New Europa it is literally a Faerie castle, thrown up by a powerful spell cast by the Faerie Lord Auberon. I don't want to give away too much of the plot of the novella. Just mentioning the disparate elements makes it seem like a horrible mish-mash: Infernal Devices, Steamtech, Dwarfs, the Seelie and Unseelie Courts, Otto von Bismarck, dragons. Perhaps beyond belief, it does hang together.

Mike Pondsmith has always had a flair for designing systems (or perhaps I should say *re-designing* the same system) that are simple, yet elegant. *CF* takes the concept of Rules Lite™ to a whole new level. There are no character sheets. Characters are defined by deciding which six Abilities your character is Great, Good, or Poor at. That's it. No stats, no secondary characteristics to calculate, no cascade skills -- none of it. Better than 95% of character generation consists of answering a series of focussing questions ("Describe your romantic life." "Who (or what) is your Nemesis?") in your Journal or Diary. It almost makes me wonder if RTG bought out a company that makes blank books. ☺

In keeping with the idea of a Steam Age Adventure Entertainment, no dice are used to resolve what game mechanics do exist. Rather, cards are the preferred randomizers. A standard deck is recommended, although I plan to use a tarot deck with the Major Arcana removed, as the Pages will provide a "Joker" for each suit. Each player (as well as the ref) holds a hand of four cards from the Fortune Deck, and may play one or more cards to improve the success of an attempted Feat. Each suit of cards provides its full value only to specific types of Feats (eg., Clubs have full value only in Feats of Physical Ability); in all other cases the value is nominal. As players can redraw to fill their



hands after a Feat, there seems to be little reason not to play cards in support of an attempt.

Sorcery is conducted the same way, except that players draw a new card every two minutes. Again, only a suit relevant to the type of spell provides full value. With sorcery, however, the more cards of Unaligned Power (that is, the off-suits) that are used, the more likely there will be an unintended side-effect to the spell. If a Joker is drawn at any point, the spell automatically backfires. It's a fun, dramatic system that provides a lot of tension and gives wizards reasons to cooperate (for the really big spells, entire Orders of spellcasters must cooperate to get adequate power).

There are almost as many fascinating aspects to the game as pieces of useless bric-a-brac on a Victorian mantle. The game has one of the most obscure collections of Welsh names for types of Faerie. Or perhaps your tastes run to mixing of history and fiction: imagine Jules Verne as a *journalist* reporting on the actual activities of Captain Nemo. There are rules for creating curious Steamtech vehicles, from submarines to ornithopters to spacecraft. There are the real-world power politics of 19th Century Europe, or the fantastic intrigues between the Seelie and Unseelie Courts of Faerie. There's even a spiffy little diceless duelling system.

As I said, I'm not even going to pretend that this is an objective review of *CF*. Even if you have little or no interest in Victoriana or steampunk, at least pick up the book and take a look at it. I think you'll be impressed by what you see.

Oh, yes.....and don't forget. Steam *will* save the world.

## Comments on Interregnum #5

**Maranci:** Congratulations on an excellent survey of live role playing. As you said, the definitive statement may require a book, but your piece is an excellent introduction. One question I had while reading: which form fosters superior "world" development -- the Interactive Literature type or the Live Combat type with recurring characters?

**Phillies:** Even if there is no intelligent life to be found on the Infobahn (the Steve Jackson Games vs. White Wolf flame war being an excellent case-in-point), someone using a handle such as "Ludwig Plutonium"



Internet:  
dej@ctrl.medicine.wisc.edu



**Tawdry Net.Gossip:**  
Has anyone else been as amused as I have with the recent tempest-in-a-teapot on rec.games.frp.misc? Steve Jackson went public with a very angry post regarding White Wolf's alleged obstruction of the GURPS Mage adaption. The president of WW responded to it as a question of character (not commenting on the substantive portions of Jackson's claim). After that, everyone with an axe to grind seemed to come out of the (virtual) woodwork.

suggests that there is at least creativity to be found. I do hope that time and creativity will allow the return of fiction to your zine in the near future.

**Pili:** Interesting thoughts on character motivation. I am of a mind to allow players develop characters that are as complex as they wish. Some have motivational structures almost as complex as real people (although they never experience the range of different situations that real people do); other players prefer to develop only a small number of character motivations. Either way works. What I don't care for is game systems that try to develop a rigid set of "traits" or "personality characteristics," then reward or punish players based on how well they adhere to them. Yuck.

**Taylor:** Thank you for your thoughtful observations on how M:tG in played in your area. It appears there *are* more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy. ☺

**Howes:** Welcome to *IR*! I enjoyed your weaving of AD&D™ and the Grail Quest (although you realize, of course, that Sir Thomas Mallory was in violation of copyright law. T\$R, Inc.™ Corporate Lawyers™ will be serving him presently). I'm intrigued by the question of whether there is a tangible reward for being virtuous. You say that there is not, but follow this with a utilitarian argument worthy of Jeremy Bentham. If we indeed acted to bring "harmony and happiness to our own lives and those around us," would that not be a utilitarian virtue? Would people not reap tangible benefits of their virtuous behavior, and thus be more likely to repeat it?

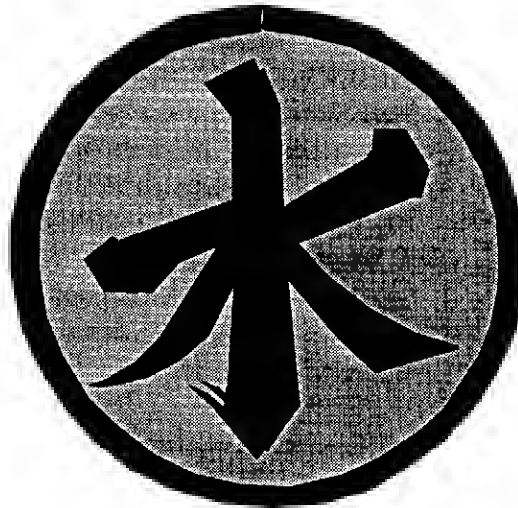
**Meier:** Welcome to *IR*! Has White Wolf gone too far? Of course they have. The Goth vampire-poseur fan-boy with his clove cigarette and ankh necklace have become a Net.Caricature. The advertising they produce simply panders to this sub-cult identification: *We're the Bad Boys of RPG. Are you cool enough to hang with us?* I appreciate that you have religious objections to some of the material that WW produces, but those objections are not shared by everyone in this society (those who do share them will chose not to buy or sell these products, as is their right). As far as presenting a more positive face to the religious community, I'm not sure what the perceived benefit would be. A great many religious leaders have no problem with the content of role playing games. Among those who do, few seem willing to make the distinction you do between using tarot cards for "occult purposes" and saying, "My magic-user casts a sleep spell."



**Intelligence:** My favorite definition of all time comes from E.G. Boring, who, when asked to defend the Army Alpha and Beta intelligence tests used in WW I, said, "Intelligence is what the test measures."

**Ferrier:** The "Special Post Nuke Issue"?!?! Geez, I hate it when I forget to read alt.destroy.the.earth for a week. I miss all the important stuff! ☺ Excellent photo, too.

**Greene:** Some very interesting and provocative thoughts on the nature of intelligent life. I believe that the Politically Correct Thought Police might take you to task for the "humano-centric" nature of the communalities of intelligent life. It would seem that much of the debate hinges on the assumption of what constitutes "intelligence." Is it the capacity to learn from experience? Or are you adding the caveat of self-awareness as well?



# REFUGEE # -54

George Phillies  
87-6 Park Avenue  
Worcester MA 01609  
508-754-1859(b,a)  
508-831-5334(o)  
Internet:phillies@wpi.wpi.edu At any hour, try o first.

The contents of this zine include fiction and commentary. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

## Commentationes

*Editorial Page:* We commend the merit of sending out the mailing reminder a week earlier than you do, so that people get it before rather than after it is too late to do any good. However, this is a personal opinion.

*The Log That Flies:* My gaming interests, to the extent that they survive, involve superbero gaming, not the medieval or cyberpunk styles that lend themselves to live-action efforts. "I'm flying at mach three" is just hard to do on the ground. I think this typeface is Times Roman, run through LaTeX. I do not use Postscript or that other thing you have mentioned. Allegedly Babylon 5 has a 5 year plot line, but it is not very visible yet. You will get the consistency you want, for the most part, from externally syndicated shows, not network shows, because there is some chance of intelligent contributions to plotwriting.

*Session Notes:* I must confess that I don't watch television (at all) and rarely see a film, so most of your comments are quite obscure to me. The local video store went under — well, they dumped that part of their business in favor of comics, sf books and games, etc., which sell much better. Indeed, they even had better business from their radio tape sales. Just think, fifty year old Superman radio tape sales. I did buy a stack of old sf films, mostly from the fifties; the best of the lot was *The Mysteries*, an earth vs space invaders film in which both sides had something resembling a range of tactics, rather than a zero. I also picked up a copy of *War of the Worlds*, complete with great shots of the B45 flying wing (the jet version) coming as close as it ever did to combat.

*Strange Sands:* Why do people behave as they do? Different reasons. You had an interesting list. It strikes me that "force of habit" belongs on there someplace. Large parts

of what we do is an established routine that takes much effort to break. (Consider the humming and hawing that was required before I finally this summer eliminated the world Phillies surplus by losing twenty pounds [five more to go]). These things can be done, but they are not easy. I will endorse your list of topics as being of interest.

*Who is John Galt?* My numbering system? Well, I started by continuing numbers over from *The Wild Hunt*, and may go back to that as soon as it is clear whether the Hunt will ever produce another issue or not. By report they had a July collation of the Blacow memorial issue, and Collie Collier claims that Scott Ruggels actually received his issue along with a bunch of back issues he had ordered. I know of no one else who has been mailed one. In any event, I decided that I would instead give people an interesting numbering system. For example, 42 is -6 x 9, leading (in a certain film) people to conclude that God has 13 fingers.

*Shepherds Pie:* It's perfectly obvious. The priest and the ranger are chaotic evil, or perhaps chaotic lawful, and the Paladin is not terribly good at sorting out the alignment of his fellows. One might also propose that the GM is of the well known alignment *clueless moron*, but that would not be nice, so I will not make the suggestion.

I had not read of Sir Bors. Having a few of his kind running around in a modern campaign (or many modern SF novels) would be \*bigly\* amusing. Not only does virtue not come naturally to humans, but some people would have trouble recognizing it when they saw it. Assuredly, White told the story as it would have been told by persons of the time of Sir Galahad, not as it would have been told by moderns, whether they happened to know what was already happening in Europe or not. The large slaughter, of tens of millions of non-communist Ukrainians by their religious foes, had already taken place when he wrote.

*Tales From the Electric Underground* Commander outranking Captain is very odd. To each their own. Thanks for the intro and the SW cyberhacking description. Your description of the interaction between the Guild of Adventure Gaming and White Wolf does not quite match what I saw from the Guild, but is not wrong. The Guild decided not to sell a particular White Wolf product. I am not sure why, and they were imprecise. The rulebook in question does include one use of a four-letter word and several templates of characters from the underclasses: a working girl and an illicit purveyor of controlled narcotic substances. I do not know that either of these features is what upset them. The Guild people then announced that they had decided to go out of business, because they wanted to do other things. However to say 'is going out of business because the owners decided not to carry White Wolf's products' is overstated. As far as I can tell, the Guild could perfectly well have stayed in business while

not carrying WW products, just as some Boston Games stores have done. They decided to go out of business because thinking about WW had caused them to think about other things.

Having read *Clan Brujah* (the WW booklet that set things off in one Boston store), I would have to say that rumors that WW products go to extremes on subjects such as the occult, homosexuality, and violence are not substantiated by an examination of the facts. However, your mileage may vary, in that some people may find a module in which players are advised that the planned character is homosexual to be going to an extreme. The major characters are vampires, but vampirism appears to be presented more as a disease state than as something involving demonic possession. Some of the characters are homosexual or whatever of one sort or another. Compare, e.g., with *Burning Bright*, Melissa Scott's novel about gamesmastering (heavily module-based), in which *every single* significant character is homosexual (well, some of them are more broadminded than this). Certainly you do not encounter a serious extreme, as found in some of the ancient Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, etc.), in which relations between men and men are presented as the highest form of love, relations between men and women being explicitly identified as second-best. The violence is fairly low-level for a modern piece. I would have to look, but I have the impression that these people are under-armed relative to a good Caribbean narcotics smuggler, who typically has a stock of LAWs, not to mention the stealth semi-submarines the Times recently learned about.

In my opinion, the game was appreciably less negative than some of the cyhermaterial. However, I decline offers to play in cybercampaigns. Different people are upset by different things. *Valley of Horses* managed to sit on the Times best seller list, and be reasonably respectable, despite extremely explicit sex scenes.

I found 'their obligation to maintain' phrasing (not yours, but other people's) to be a bit pompous. If they want to say that they didn't like something, or that they found it offensive, they can reasonably say so.

Wait until the French *In Nomine Satanis* (a rolegame in which, I gather, players get to play demons leading souls into temptation) reaches the USA. The game was sold without disturbance in France. (The game also offers players the opportunity to play angels, and tempt NPCs to the paths of light.)

I think it may be fairly said that your stance, since it endorses the truth of Christianity, is in zero danger of being labelled 'politically correct', at least by anyone who knows what they are talking about. If you want to receive the label, post it to the Net, where there are plenty of people who do not know what they are talking about.

*Aye, Matey*: Bomb Shelters of the Holy was really amusing. The technical fault of the Home Medical program was interesting. I suppose they could have provided it with two versions of the diagrams and a lockout program 'Parents, run this if you don't want your children to know...until you tell them' and 'Parents, run this if your working plan for your fifteen year old is to order the pharmacist that your daughter may charge products of type XXX, no questions asked, and the item is to show up blank on the bill, up to \$Y a month'. (I know parents with both of these plans.)

*8-Track Mind*: War of the Worlds was so silly as a TV show it deserved to be put to death in advance. There were plenty of interesting possibilities for the show, but this was not one of them.

### Fiction

This is a new novel. It will go for a distance, and then quit.

### NO TEARS FOR A PRINCESS

#### THE WARRIOR UNSEEN

Strive not, good sir, 'gainst stormy wave,  
Nor cry my name 'neath star-topped nave,  
For Death stalks me with wand and stave  
To seal my soul in stoneclogged cave.  
So shed no tears for princess brave  
Who knows she goes to unmarked grave  
But still will ride, her land to save.

...The Ballad of Three Princes

#### OPENING...

The river Tressin flowed majestically into the setting sun. Arburg-am-Tressin, largest city in thirty leagues, brooded on the southern shore. The city's gray walls jutted out into the water, oblivious to the rumble and groan of the currents at their base. Across the water, half-a-mile distant, masses of trees were red and yellow flames in the frost-touched fall air.

Two guards looked cautiously across the river. They chatted nervously about nothing in particular, scarcely aware of their own words. From time to time they peered furtively over mail-clad shoulders. To their right, the wall was topped by a series of small watchtowers. To their left, the parapet ended in a granite-tiled plaza, the city's farthest projection into the river. A pair of blue-robed mages waited on the further wall, continually pausing in their conversation to look down the parapet beyond the

guards.

A single figure came briskly up distant stair. Its deep hood and plain green cloak concealed body and face, but failed to hide a long stride and broad shoulders. The two guards glanced knowingly at its approach, then moved in front of their watchtower, out from the figure's line of sight. The magicians pretended to maintain a conversation, each struggling not to look elsewhere than the other's face.

The figure strolled along the parapet, slowly nearing the plaza. A slant of cloak suggested a stare across the river, as if the newcomer were admiring the wilderness. Finally, moving quietly, the figure passed the last watchtower and stepped onto the terrace. The magicians turned away, to begin a stroll along the further parapet. One gestured with a wand; the other mouthed an incantation as though testing his memory.

As on previous evenings, the figure stopped to watch the sun set. One guard reached backwards, ever so slightly, to release the tower door. Three figures in dull black - black slippers, black trousers, black tunics, black capes and masks - slipped silently from the guardhouse. One held a massive cudgel; the others waved tawdry short-swords. Three in black stalked one in green, closing on padded, spell-silenced feet.

Cudgel-bearer swung his weapon down at the green hood. His target lurched forward at the blow. A clatter of wood on metal revealed a helm hidden under the cloth. Cudgel-bearer cursed. Reversing his weapon's swing, he smashed green across ribs and back. Green skidded over smooth-polished stone, finally rolling to peer skywards. Black ran in pursuit. One swordsman went to each side of their prey. Black dropped his cudgel, producing in the same fluid motion a dagger. His cloak swirled raven-dark as he pounced on his victim. The knife stabbed down.

The swordsmen saw Green's long fingers snap up, taking Black's knife hand at the wrist. The cloak draped over both of them, shrouding prey and predator alike. A convulsive motion of the cloak was the knife stabbing down again and again. The movement stopped. The swordsmen relaxed, grinning at each other. It had been a delicate job, in which their part was now accomplished.

The guardsmen stood at attention. The junior wished that he were elsewhere, no matter that he would gain a promotion for his deeds this day. He had heard the thud of a club, the ring of metal on metal, and finally a solid splash from the river below. He counted seconds and turned, knowing he would find a vacant stone plaza.

Three black figures lay in ever-widening scarlet lakes, formed from their own blood. The mages, returned to the plaza, gestured at the senior of the guards. "Tell the Master!" one of them snapped. The junior guard peered

over the wall. He thought he saw a disturbance in the water, nearly lost in the sparkle from the setting sun. He tried not to hear what then happened behind him.

The senior guard scurried down the stairs, dodging temporary barricades held by his own men, to enter the city's heart. His run took him through winding streets, past tradesmen on their business, past taverns and homes. His boots pounded on the cobbled pavement, their rhythm punctuated by the wheeze of his breathing. He ignored jugglers, quarreling bobgoblins, a sorcerer's gracious arrival on flying carpet. A collision with the pushcart of a trollish streethawker sent fruit rolling in all directions; he ran on, ignoring the curses directed at his back.

Castle gates loomed before him. Barely breaking stride, the guard drew an amulet from one pocket; sentries gave way at its sight. A final sprint down carpeted ballways brought him to a double door. Four pikemen stood at the ready, blocking all entrance. They peered momentarily at the guardsman, then stood aside. The guard knocked thrice and swung one door open.

Within waited a solitary man in black and ermine. Gold lace on his coat accented a blond van Dyke and trimly cut hair. His rigid demeanor was complimented by dark, deeply carved furniture and tapestried walls. His lips curled upwards when he recognized the guardsman. "Is it done, Grand-Captain?" he whispered when the door swung shut.

The runner gasped a single phrase: "Alive, M'Lord Duke."

The blond face contorted in fury. "Damnation!" he shouted. A black and gold arm threw a wine goblet in an arc. It spun through the air, crystal sides gleaming, to shatter against the farther wall. "A thousand gold crowns! Gone! Wasted!" The Duke's fist smote the table, once and again, harder and bolder. "The Curse of Al-Benzir be on that one!" He sank dejectedly into his chair. "Summon my advisors again. There must be a way. This affront to my dignity can not be permitted to endure."

\* \* \* \* \*

North of the Tressin, a green-cloaked figure stood in the shallows, still gasping for breath. A plain unpatterned cape hung soddenly around strong shoulders and narrower waist. The figure clambered up the bank, mud squishing through bare toes. Sandals lay discarded in the depths of the river.

On shore the figure stopped. Lean fingers undid a throat clasp. One arm gathered the cloak, while the other reached to the waist. A single touch confirmed that the short-sword was still secure in its scabbard. The hood fell back, revealing a newly-dented steel-lined helm with short nose guard.

The figure looked back over the water. Arhurg-am-Tressin sat placidly in the distance. The sun's rays reflected brilliantly from tower windows, leaving the river an inky blue. Birds soared and dipped above the current, their feathers tinged pink by the setting sun. A tilt of the head released the helm, which joined the still-dripping cloak over a well-muscled arm.

Her hair fell back, to hang golden-brown across her neck. One hand cleared stray locks from sea-green eyes. A gleaming line of chain mail rose above her collar. Seen without the cloak, her dark green tunic clung to her armour, revealing the slight curves of her body. She looked perhaps sixteen. Her mouth pursed, reflecting not so much fear as a touch of sadness. She pushed hair clear of the nape of her neck and probed gingerly where the club had struck her helm. Further pokes at her ribs evinced grimaces of pain. As the sun set, she turned from the river and disappeared into the woods.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER ONE (Mages, Men)

A small fire crackled in the hearth, its flames competing feebly with the luminous white glow from the wall sconces. Left of the hearth, polished maple shelves were crowded with hooks and scrolls. Before them stood several antique globes and an armillary sphere. A gleaming bronze orrery hung like a giant spider, guarding the great window on the adjoining wall. The window seat was littered with bottles and alembics; more abstruse thaumaturgic implements lay piled on the carpet heneath.

The girl sat before the fire in a deeply-padded winged armchair. A silk robe, ruby-red, was tied primly at her waist and pulled close around her neck. The robe drooped beyond her toes; deeply folded cuffs at each wrist confirmed that the robe had another, much taller, for an owner. Her armour lay on the flagstones near her feet. The green cloak and tunic were closer to the fire, slowly drying in its heat.

She peered down through curling wisps of steam into a mug cradled in her hands, then inhaled, enjoying the scents of cocoa, cardamom and mace. At last she looked up, a smile coming to her lips.

"Grandoon?" she called softly. The target of her question was a dark-haired, heavily bearded man who sat puttering at his workbench. He was staring into an intricate piece of clockwork which floated, without visible support, a few inches beyond his nose. His tools hovered in convenient reach, equally without support. He finished an adjustment, muttered slightly, then looked to the girl. A gesture dismissed clockwork and tools, which fluttered obediently to rest on a felted benchtop.

"Ah! Elaine! Are you feeling better?" His voice rolled

separately over each syllable. He stood and walked to her side.

"Me?" she shrugged. "Yeah, 'course I'm okay. A little swim and bump on the head never hurt anybody. You don't have to worry so much. I just got a hit wet."

"Bump on the head? Elaine, that won't do at all! You have at least three cracked ribs, undoubtedly compounded by swimming the full width of the Tressin. In late fall. In full armor. By rights, you should be confined to bed for a week." He felt for the pulse at her throat. It beat its uniquely intricate double rhythm, fast and slow, no longer racing from an evening's excitement.

"Hmnh!" she snorted. "Bed! For a lazybones like you, that's one thing. Of course, for someone serious hurt, a day or two might make a teeny bit of sense." Her irritation was only mock serious. "If I spent a week in bed, every time I got bumped around a bit, I'd be due to stay in bed for ever and a while longer. Besides, it was hardly full armor."

"It wasn't?" His eyebrows wrinkled.

"I didn't wear greaves, nor mailed gloves. I didn't have iron-shod shoes - just as well, you can't swim with them. As it was, that much weight, you swim at a sprint, or you sink; river's not too wide for that. I didn't have a shield, though a Lyran shield, cross-grained cemented wood, is a dandy float. A few bits of chain are hardly full armor." Her teeth gleamed behind her smile. Earlier in the day, Grandoon had teased her about wearing armor in a civilized, friendly city. He'd said that if she really felt in danger, he could find her a set of jousting plate in her size. She'd told him to be patient. Her smile widened. As he looked to the ceiling, she reached up and slid his hand from her shoulder onto the arm of the chair.

"Now, Grandoon, look." Her tone was serious again. "You've been real nice. I mean, thanks for watching my pack and letting me dry off and giving me the cocoa and not complaining about cleaning the pheasants I caught and even letting me eat one, but I just came back to get my bow and stuff. I can't be staying."

"You most certainly can," he answered. "What sort of a host would I be to put you out into this chill autumn evening? Your clothing is only half-dry."

"That's better'n might be," she answered matter-of-factly. "I've walked in darn-sight colder weather in wetter gear. Visiting Arburg darn near got me killed. I should've left days ago, soon as I could walk without limping much."

"Now, really, you should surely hold the city harmless. The Duke can't stop every common street thief."

"You know," for a half-sentence her irritation was real, "for a eight-hundred-year old master sorcerer you can be

awful, awful innocent. That was a setup from the word Go! Somebody just didn't put enough bully boys into it. Against me, anyway, he didn't. Might've been enough 'gainst some people. You'd think my reputation would've warned him. He knows what I did here, what force didn't take me out, last time. But whoever did it had the city militia - and a piece of your Guild - in his pocket."

"And you suggest on my innocence?" retorted Grandoon. "Oh, you're scarcely two-hundredths my age. I suppose I must be patient. You're talking about a real Trained Band of a city guard, not a hunch of village yokels whose necks turn for a few pence."

"I know. I know! That's why it had to be rigged. On the parapet, no guards - in fact nobody at all in the whole plaza. Right outside, two guards, two mages. The guards hid when I approached. They couldn't've missed hearing a fight, not steel on steel, even if they're stone-drunk and half-deaf. They just stood there, hacks carefully turned. Only the Duke or his cronies could do that. Rig the guard roster, put trusted people in place, order 'em not to hear, and have everyone else out of earshot. The mages must've set an illusion screen, so no one in the buildings behind the plaza saw anything. I was dumb! I deserve what happened to me! I just walked into it. There's always hunches of people in that plaza at twilight, all watching the sunset. When I saw the rig, I dove into the Tressin. Didn't know what the backup was to the thugs and their friends, may be more'n I could handle. At least without getting serious hurt. But a river's safe - too big to put a spell on, leastways with me in it - just a bit cold. It was better'n facing surprises if I stayed."

Frowning, she ruffled the hack of her head again. "Besides, those guys were half good, almost. 'Course they weren't so good as me, but they came in a hunch. From behind. The guy with the cluh tried coup de grace with his knife. Was he surprised when I grabbed his hand! Must not've known how easy wrist bones crush. His friends didn't help. They just stood there, the slackjaws, let me up onto one knee. Their fancy swords might've been magic - but only fumblefingers were holding 'em."

Grandoon stood for a moment, lost in thought, pondering Elaine's observations. She tried to sound the role of a common sell-sword, but the ideas behind her words bespoke a razor-sharp mind, if one too confident of her abilities as a warrior. "I suppose," he answered, "you might be correct. The Trained Bands are under oath to Gow All-Knowing. To avert Divine Retribution, for failing to uphold the peace, would consume no small number of crowns. However, Guardsmen who obey orders break no oath. Such orders could only come from the Duke or his loyal ministers. All that lacks is a motive. Why would the Duke want to kill you? After all, you saved his capital from the Apostate...from the tyrant Pyrrin. You're a heroine."

"You answered your own question. I saved his city. Someone had to save it for him. I didn't do anything his siege engines wouldn't've done, sooner or later, proh'ly. But I did it, not him. And he was the jealous sort, insecure, even before he had to flee Arburg in his fancy-pink nightgown. I didn't really save his city, though. His army did that. I just jumped a few sentries."

"A few dozen, you mean," murmured Grandoon under his breath.

She snorted, annoyed by his trivial, if accurate, correction. "So he's jealous. He's got that reputation already. Look how long his good advisors last. How do you think he got himself into this mess? Besides, people get, get uncomfortable, if I stay around them too long." She frowned again, then looked wistful. He stood quietly until she began to sip at her drink.

"You will stay, won't you? You can hardly go far in the darkness." His voice softened. He leaned toward the chair, his hand straying again over her shoulder.

"Now, really, I take care of myself. Besides, where could I sleep? Or have you got a magic guesthouse to match your magic cottage?" She leaned out from under his touch.

"There is a bed."

"And leave you to sleep on the floor? You haven't been without a soft mattress in two hundred years, and you know it!"

"Well, Elaine, since you did raise the issue, to sleep on a carpet might not be altogether comfortable. Of course, you are not that young, nor precisely unattractive, so one might have supposed that you would be aware of a traditional, potentially enjoyable alternative."

Her cheeks were suddenly a rosy pink. She stared into the fire, half-hiding a smile. "Oh, Grandoon. You know perfectly well I don't like that sort of talk."

"I just made a simple observation," he said unsurprisedly. "I suppose I could do some more work this evening." He turned to his workbench and gestured. Clockwork and tools floated back into position.

Elaine sat for a while, savoring the drink Grandoon had brewed for her. It was certainly better than her familiar fare of dried heef, traveller's biscuits, foraged wild cooking greens, and tea. Dry clothing and a fireplace were friendlier than the out-of-doors, at least for tonight. Usually, she was uncomfortable under a strange roof, preferring except in deepest winter to sleep under the familiar solitude of the constellations. Grandoon's cottage almost made her feel at home, not that she had another home with which to compare. Forced rest after a narrow escape often left her meditating on her objectives for this life; tonight she wanted to avoid those considerations. Seeing

Grandoon lost in his tinkering, she tiptoed to the bookshelf and pulled out a slim volume.

Far later, Grandoon paused and rubbed his eyes. A glance at the clock convinced him to dismiss his work. Elaine was buried in her hook, deep in thought while he walked behind her. She resisted only slightly when he leafed it back to see the title page.

"Treganth? *Elementary Principles in Symbolics*? For all its slight size, the *Tractatus Symbolicus* is a most weighty tome."

"Yeah, by the end, you have to be careful how you follow it. He sneaks his arguments up on you, bit by bit, in the earlier chapters. Then he ambushes you, making everything come together, all at once. Could we talk about it?"

Grandoon looked prayerfully at the ceiling. "You certainly could ask smaller favors. Few indeed are the mages who penetrate the core of that volume, let alone its closing. But why? You're not Illuminated by the Presence, as you've noted more than once."

"Because it's there. So I'm talentless, and can't set the teeniest spell. So I have my private Silence, which damps all I touch." She reached out and cupped a lamp in her hands. The light spell within glowered red and died. "I can still want to know. I can still teach the Art, except no one listens to me. And magic is a part of the world. A big part, where armies are concerned." She removed her hands from the lamp, which flared back to life. "Just because the Presence is silent to me now, doesn't mean it always will be. Besides, it, it..." She looked into the fire. Her voice faded. "It does run in my family, sort of." She stared at the floor, suddenly very quiet.

Grandoon peered at her downcast head. She was entranced by ancient memories, gray and gloomy. Finally she dragged out a smile. "May be tomorrow?" she whispered. He nodded agreement.

\* \* \* \* \*

The lamps were dark. Coals glowed low in the fireplace. Clockwork, tools, and book were carefully returned to their rightful places. Elaine lay near the fireplace, layered between a thin pad and thinner quilt. Drowsily, she rolled to one side, then stretched, confirming that her sword was in easy reach. She touched the hilt. The lines of her face and shoulders softened. Elaine smiled slightly as she rolled over further, finally pressing her nose to the pillow and drifting off into deep sleep.

## CHAPTER TWO (Men, Elaine, Mages)

The next evening found them well away from Arhurg. Grandoon grimaced when he recalled the afternoon's events. He had spent hours improving his clockwork, a

pleasure for which he recently had had less and less time. Elaine occasionally interrupted him to ask about Treganth. *Elementary Principles in Symbolics* was at best a subtle text. Treganth was reputed to have made only a single mistake in all his written work, that a trivial one which Treganth himself had corrected. It was also reputed that in all Treganth's work only a single sentence was easy to understand, that being his acknowledgement to his printer's sponsors. To Grandoon's dismay and consequent delight, Elaine reserved her questions for the most obscure parts of Treganth's commentary, on which she raised fundamental, interesting issues of interpretation.

Their discussion of Treganth had been interrupted by the arrival of Earl Yvaine, a ferret-eyed sycophant of the Duke's. The Earl brought with him two gifts: an enchanted sword, and a prophecy from the local sybil, swearing that Elaine's fortune was best sought to the North. Elaine was rigidly and precisely polite. The Earl took her politeness as a series of veiled attacks on his liege's generosity, eventually departing in a fuming rage. Elaine told Grandoon that it was time to leave. He grumped and harrumphed about travelling, though he knew that a Duke who hated Elaine might not be pleased with her companions.

Grandoon's thoughts returned to the present. The twin moon Tegel-La was well above the horizon. The north highway, faced with gray-white limestone, was a barely seen ribbon, fading into the woods ahead. Elaine kept to the side of the road, quietly slipping from tree to tree, from shadow to shadow. Grandoon marched holdly down the road's center, as though the night could hold no danger for him.

He gestured for her to stop. He wrapped himself in shadow, and bound the air around them in silence. A few passes of his hands formed the illusion of the two of them standing side by side, brilliantly lit by a sorcerer's staff. A final wave sent the illusions marching down the road. Satisfied with his work, he followed, preceded at a hundred paces by the images he had created. Let thieves and cutpurses strike; they would only reveal themselves to his wrath.

While the moon rose slowly into the western sky, they spoke of little things: the sights of Arburg, a shooting star, the advance of the fall weather. An owl hooting in the distance was their only company.

"Do your rihs still bother you?" asked Grandoon.

"Naw, not really. I mean, I still feel bruises. Don't worry. That couple- three street thugs didn't really hurt me. I was more wet, angry, and cold than anything else."

"You think they were cutpurses?"

"Well, sure. They were lucky, and I was careless. 'Course,



if I wandered through towns – ones where people know me – in simple cloth, no helm or armor, I'd be dead again, ummh, I mean, well, half-dead again. You saw the dent in my helmet – and I really appreciate your fixing it. But the Duke's a cheapskate. He just hought road vultures, the sort who'd have their own accidents later, with no pointed questions asked. They just had a cluh and some half-decent swords. No armor. Those ... they didn't even use their capes to tangle my sword. Jerks!" She snorted derisively. "They were nice capes, too, black satin and gold lace lining."

Grandoon was suddenly more attentive. "Gold lace? On the inside?"

"Yeah, now that you ask. Hadn't thought about it. Inside. Even their tailors were dumb. You couldn't see the lace most of the time."

Grandoon pulled a scrap of parchment from one pocket. "Was this how the lace was worked?" he asked. Luminous ink flowed over the page, swiftly forming a series of interlocked spirals.

Elaine scowled. "Didn't look at it much. I'd other things to do, right then, and the cloth was pretty rumpled." She paused in thought. Her memory, which readily stored even the most intricate of runes, matched Grandoon's parchment against half-glimpsed curliques of spun gold. "That's it. I'm sure. Is it some particular local hunch of punks, who may he might keep a grudge?"

"That, my dear," Grandoon assumed his usual avuncular tone, "is how one recognizes an adherent of the Order of The Seven Deaths, while he is practicing his vocation openly. Should the question arise, I trust you will neglect to remember who called this ill-known fact to your attention."

"Master assassins? For me? But why hother? Those guys cost purseloads, not that they're worth it. I didn't think the Duke was that jealous. Don't worry. My lips are sealed. Those creeps hire out to Pyrrin. I've got the one true answer for them." She slapped her sword-scahhard and passed one finger across her throat.

"Purseloads? You have the most charming gift of understatement. As you left the three of them dead, your foe also owes their weregild, which doubtless will set someone – the city's honest ratepayers, I fear – back a tidy sum. The Duke wanted success, followed by a sure absence of consequential blackmail. The Order is reliable in the last respect."

"Reliable? Assassins? Well, yeah, they do stay hought. But those clods were feeble! I can hold my hreath longer than it took to stomp all three of them, and I just had your short-sword, not Peacemaker here," said Elaine, tapping her bastard-sword's hilt to acknowledge having spo-

ken its name.

"Order blades are also set with the direst of poisons, more powerful than anything other than the semi-mythical distilled essence of manticore venom. Had you been scratched..." His voice trailed off when he remembered that she had taken not one but several deep slashes.

"Must've washed off in the river," she answered nonchalantly. "Cuts stung more than they should've, at least at first."

"Yes, of course," answered Grandoon. A single scratch from an assassin's blade brought an elephant to its knees in moments. He recounted his protections, briefly afraid she was part of an elaborate plot to kill him. You, he thought to himself, you thought she was absurdly lucky at the gate. She looks like a not-quite-grown-up fifteen-year-old hauling her big brother's overweight sword and oversize how. But she's more than that, in strange ways. Her protections against magecraft and poison are not unique, but how do they work? She's not wearing a single amulet. You made your investigations in Arhurg-am-Tressin today. Everything you learned points to her story about the assassins being true.

"And the Duke sent them," said Elaine, more to herself than to Grandoon. "That wall was empty, no witnesses. Only the Duke could arrange that. But why?" She was downfaced. "I saved his city, and didn't even ask for any big reward or anything like that." Her thoughts hurt her more than any of the blows she had taken. "He couldn't be afraid of me. I mean, he's got a fortified city, Trained Bands by the Regiment, an enchanted palace – now that he's willing to activate the enchantments, rather than moaning at their price. And he does have some decent advisors, even if he is suspicious. It must be like court manners. No matter what I say, people get mad. Like Earl Yvaine today. He gave me the sword, but when I tried to thank him, ... , well, you saw what happened. I never say things quite right."

"I saw and heard. However, your style was entirely proper." From her manner in addressing the Earl, Grandoon had concluded that Elaine was well-born, perhaps of a noble house. Peasant maids simply did not learn the modes of address she had used so elegantly.

"My style? Oh, come on, Grandoon! You were there! He was angry, just from having to put up with me. I never say things quite right. But I'm never sure afterwards. What do I say wrong?" She shook her head and looked skywards. Tegel-La was a tangerine half-hidden in a black lattice of leaves and branches.

"Do you really want that answered?" His tone was suddenly serious.

"Thanks, I've had my fill of lectures on howing and scrap-



ing." She continued to look at the sky, drinking in the peace of moon and stars. For a space they walked together, neither speaking. "That is what you meant, isn't it? Oh, go ahead! Tell me. Why not?"

"Some things are difficult to say with grace. You might take offense." She caught a retort in her throat, then nodded impatiently. He stared at how the moonlight caught the curves and planes of her face. Strange, he wondered, that none of the men in the Duke's Court had tried courting her, before they knew her well.

"Doubtless," he began, "you know Bishop Averoff's book of riddles. A classic is 'What is the way of a moon through the sky, a swan through the air, a ship through the sea, a man with a maid?' I have spent much of my life trying to answer the first question, without great success. The second and third parts are not so hard, at least for one of my modest learning. Recently, I came to understand the last."

"You? Recently? But you're supposed to have ... I mean, your reputation as a lady's man got here before you."

Grandoon smiled. "You're thinking of something a little different. But surely someone your age has known a boyfriend or two?"

"Me? Oh, yeah! Sure! Two or three all the time. Hadn't you noticed?" The defiance melted from her voice. "No, not really. When I was a younger, there were a couple fellows - all we ever did is hold hands. But none of them ever liked me for very long."

"Did you like them?"

"Well, ... yes". Her sadness gave her an aura of greater age. She wondered why she was admitting so much. Where did Grandoon's arguments lead?

"In my homeland, things were different. The warmth was actually in the caress itself, not in the thought behind it. Here the relevant proverb is 'None greeted as warmly as mage's friends, nor met so coldly as mage's foes.' I suspect you never thought that proverb made sense. Unlike your fellow mortals, you find my magely greetings neither warmer nor colder than anyone else's. The reason - your problem - is you, rather, your aura. Your suitors, whatever their inclinations, were daunted by that fortress which is your mind."

"The problem's me?" she shouted, at the edge of an explosion of anger. He'd hardly given an explanation, let alone one she'd expected. Was he mocking her? She had rejected him last night. "Are you trying to confuse me?" Her words came in bursts, like the thrusts of a dagger. "You've done it! Riddles and proverbs! You know perfectly well I'm no mage, nor a riddlemaster either. The last one before you to notice I'm a girl was that drunk-

ard, Earl Gloric, the day before the city fell. He didn't try court manners or caresses, either, or take a simple 'no' for an answer. How did you think his arms got themselves broken?"

"Now, let me weave together the threads of my argument - though you gave the Earl his just desserts." Grandoon continued imperturbably ahead. "Most men have no command of the Presence, of the Art which lets me raise mountains and revive the dead. But almost everyone in the world - in this world, anyway, not every world - uses magic all the time in small ways."

"What? Magic's something you learn from books, from meditation and ritual practice, not something for every swineherd and goatgirl."

"You don't count tindspark and horsecalm and doorseal and dusthane?" he asked.

"Those aren't the same. Those are warrior's tricks and women's secrets, not the wisdom of the enlightened. Though I guess they must be some sort of magic, now that you mention them, since I can't do any of them."

"As I began by saying, I have only recently come to understand the truth. It would appear that sorcery is merely the conscious use of an innate ability of all men."

"I don't believe it!" she answered without hesitation. Everyone was a mage? The Mayevin Empire, gone to ruin three centuries past, had claimed a mage on every street-corner, but that was a tale for innocent travellers. She shook her head. In the hack of her mind she set up a list of acts beyond tindspark and horsecalm, all of which had always been denied her. Certainly she knew few persons, other than herself, who habitually carried flint and steel to start a fire. Most of those, now that she thought about them, had had reasons to want to be any-nar - thaumaturgically inert, difficult to scry or hespell.

"My colleagues were even more sceptical. After all, the idea threatens my profession's arcane reputation. But I have definitive proof. My new cryptic mirror, undoubtedly the finest ever made, is just sensitive enough to reveal it. If one finds a pair of lovers walking arm in arm, one sees through the mirror that they reinforce their physical contact with psychic bonds, of precisely the sort found in spells of empathic control. The couple's bonds, of course, are used to enhance love, not to enslave. A great general inspiring his troops before battle uses the same bonding, so every man and woman in the army knows that every other man in the whole army depends personally on him, or her. Of course, one with proper thaumaturgic training automatically strengthens the bonds, making greetings Summer-hot or lizard-cold, without realizing he's doing it, whencefrom the proverb." He let Elaine's thoughts take their course. To understand the works she read, she was clearly brilliant. Her tough-sounding talk was a mas-

querade, a verbal foil to the aura about her psyche.

"Which explains why people – some people – take fright in places where magic doesn't work?"

"Precisely. Wards which prevent active spellcasting can also inhibit psychic bonding. When warded, people no longer feel their companions around them. An inexperienced militia levy, shielded against battle magic for the first time, not infrequently panics and routs, because each man is sure his neighbors have abandoned him, even though he can see the neighbors marching forward in rigid ranks. Even the most experienced troops speak of 'the vasty gloom of battle imminent' — they know that within battle, their bonds to their friends and shieldmates will be dampened." He was suddenly touched by pity. "And you stand within your unbreaking screens, so none may judge you 'friend'. That is how you offended Earl Yvaine this noon."

"Screens? They don't bother me!" She peered away into the woods. Trees were black shadows, lost in the hreezeless air. The night was not yet cold, but now she felt chilled to her bones. Of course her aura didn't bother her. What mattered was what it did to others. She sifted through her memories. Each rejection, each betrayal, suddenly made some slight sense. Her friends sought psychic warmth, and found wintry darkness. For a time she listened to the forest's silence, letting the clatter of their footsteps echo through the hollows of her mind.

"You may have a choice." Grandoon's voice intruded into her quiet. "You have considerable formal knowledge of the Art. You are probably able to open your mind, if you choose."

"Open my shields?" For that suggestion, she wished she had left him in Arburg. It would have been so easy to slip away unseen, to move in quiet solitude through the moonlit night. "Open? So any half-baked sorcerer can knock me flat with the snap of three fingers?" His argument shook her to the core. He was right about one thing. She knew enough of the Art to see what path to take.

"There are compensations." His voice was a warm blanket.

"Compensations? For losing the better half of my armor?"

"Would you rather always be the one apart? Don't you feel the loneliness yet? I suppose that'll be more a problem when you're older. You needn't fear a sorcerer here; I'll ward us both. Besides, the loss isn't permanent; if you can silence your shields, you can recover them."

She clenched her teeth, furious with the old man. How dare he make his suggestion? She didn't really trust anyone that much, did she? Without her aura, she'd be at

his mercy. Still, she knew who he was, who had trusted him, and that he'd kept that trust. Perhaps he'd been a little forward the other night. But he was famous for that, and he took 'no' for an answer. She didn't want to try, but what was her excuse? Was she afraid? Never! Besides, the whole thing was silly. She knew perfectly well she was no mage. Impatient, wanting only to say she'd tried and failed, she brought her mind's focus upon the Rune of Opening.

The Rune was a scatter of outbound arrows, the unfolding of a rose, the first burst of light through shutters flung wide to the rising sun. Without the slightest hesitation she found the pattern, subsuming its essence into her being.

Her aura shifted ever so slightly, like an attic door which had remained closed through the decades, its hinges slowly rusting into place until someone forced its opening. The movement as the aura yielded was so startling that she flinched. Angry that she was showing weakness, she forced the Rune's image into tighter focus. Her aura shimmered and faded.

It was as though she had been standing in a pitch-black quartz-lined cavern, and suddenly unshuttered a lantern. Grandoon appeared as a flicker of lights, red and green and white, wrapped in a shroud of mist. Grandoon's warding spell surrounded them both in a cerulean blue mosaic, whose tiles danced and whirled in an intricate sarabande. A night insect flitting above her head carried with it the faintest of inner glows, like a distant candle on a foggy moor.

"Grandoon?" Her voice trailed an echo as though her ears were full of water. What had happened? she wondered. What were the lights?

"Yes? Your screens vanished in an instant, but you're still hanging back." His voice had the same trailing echo. Then she understood. She heard him speak, then heard his mind, hearing their voices.

"Grandoon?" The name caught in her throat. She had read of magespeech all her life, but never hoped to experience it. She tried to reach out, thinking his name without moving her lips or throat.

"Yes, I am Grandoon." His lips were closed. As he spoke, their minds met. With his name came a flow of associations, of recollections, of feelings as to who Grandoon thought Grandoon was. She followed his memories, recognizing the clockwork he was building, and understanding as automatically as he did how each gear and spring was supposed to function. She followed his gaze, seeing Tegel-La not as a mottled silver ornament, but as a massive ball of stone which whirled through the heavens without falling – no, which fell without coming closer to the earth, a half-contradictory notion which to Grandoon's

mind was a logical certainty, as obvious as the turn of the seasons.

"I'm Elaine," she answered. She looked at the woods, seeing them with a warrior's practiced gaze, demonstrating how to see trees. Here a man might bide. There one could take a horse. "But what are the lights?" She tried to emphasize the sudden burst of patterns around her.

"Lights? Those are... oh, I should have realized." He was slightly irritated with himself, in his usual avuncular way. "You must be united with the Presence, however much you deny it. Besides hearing magespeech, you have magesight - at least when your aura isn't blocking it. Without your aura, you see with a mage's inner eye, perceiving the Presence, the power which lies beneath the merely material world. You even cast your mind as a mage should, very cleanly, though you are still cold and formal."

"Formal? Cold?"

"Merely lack of practice. Don't worry about it. When I cast my name, you should have caught - you did? - some memories, too. With you, I bear your name, the way you hear it with your inner ear, but all I hear is the name itself, with no trace of your personality." Grandoon fidgeted, checking yet again that his more powerful thaumaturgic protections were all in order. She seemed to be without a past. Things without pasts, some of them, were nasty traps.

"I could, well, but your memories are so organized. I heard the things that you want others to know about you. What can I show you? Flattening those three thugs?" Grandoon caught a flash of remembered pain, of the speed and lethal calculation which let one normal blade prevail over two enchanted ones. "Or maybe the gatehouse last week?" With her question came more remembrances: faces staring up at a door which suddenly, unexpectedly, fell open; a dozen men trying to stand and draw weapons, only to be cut down as they rose; the spell damper, a device of cut crystal and wrought metal which deflected a mage's swing but shattered at the blow of Elaine's gloved fist.

"Usually people go farther into their own past." Grandoon's observation was accompanied by a flickering vision of strange cities with impossibly tall buildings. "Perhaps some more spectacular feat?"

Elaine found her memories yielding to the pull of his words, bringing back shadows of battles fought and mountains climbed. It was no different than talking with someone, she thought, except that Grandoon knew what she was thinking, not only what she was willing to say. To have her memories exposed to a stranger's sight was unsettling.

"Perhaps something quieter? The sea? A Temple library? What you show should be something which signifies to you." As he spoke, images streamed from her past like dead leaves in a November gale, to be matched one-to-one by images of his own. "The lordlings of the Tressin are stunningly lacking in imagination. They work through their genealogies, beginning with their honorable parents..." There came from Grandoon the briefest image of a man and woman, most oddly dressed, in a palatial candle-lit dining room. Elaine's memories started on the same trail.

"No!" she screamed. "No! No!" Her aura crashed back into place, sealing her memories in and the world out. She bent over, hands pressed against her ears. The reverberations of her aura's closing rolled back and forth through her skull. Suddenly she was afraid she was going to be sick to her stomach, even though Grandoon was still watching. "No," she whispered between rigidly controlled gasps for breath. Before Grandoon could answer, she stumbled to the side of the road, finally leaning against a massive elm. Its bark, rough and slightly damp, yielded slightly to her fingertips. She shut her eyes and pressed her head against the trunk.

Grandoon blinked. What had happened? Now Elaine was back under her screens, clearly much the worse for the experience. He reached to comfort her, no more than brushing her arm.

"Don't touch me!" Elaine snarled, pivoting away with feline speed. She stopped a few paces into the brush, facing him, fingers against her sword's pommel. She shook with emotion. Her words slipped between gasps of breath. "Was that what you meant - to share memories? You speak a few words, and ransack each other's private thoughts, your dreams and hopes? This is what people mean by love? It's disgusting!"

Grandoon was acutely embarrassed. He had kept the conversation to the most innocent of topics, the sort which most people insisted on discussing. Disaster had resulted. Of course, she had been reticent about her own past; perhaps he should not have mentioned parents. "No, Elaine, really," he answered, "you only let me have the memories you were willing to share. The others remained yours." He bit his tongue. His last claim was not precisely true. Just as Elaine's aura returned, an image had formed in her mind: a slender, well-built woman in blue and silver gown, her back turned, standing in a barren stone-walled cell.

Grandoon and Elaine stood, facing each other. Finally Elaine stopped trembling.

"Is it really like that when people are in love?" she asked, catching her breath. Her voice was a mixture of curiosity and longing, like that of a small child asking if lovers really enjoyed crushing their mouths against each other.

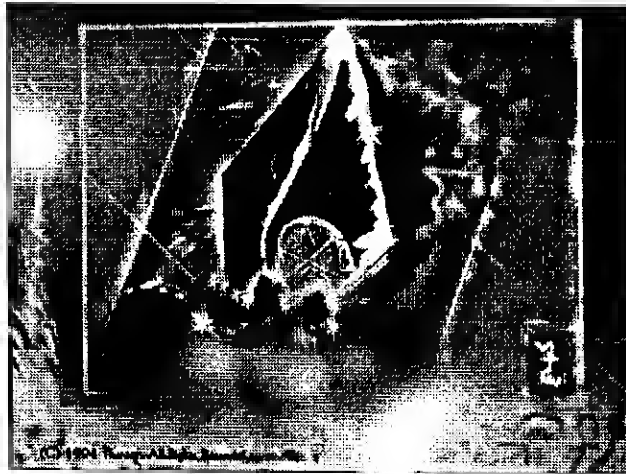
# Strange Sands

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27 Oliver Street  
Everett, MA 02149  
Gil555@aol.com

Life can be pretty odd sometimes. The summer has played havoc with our local gaming schedule, and I think I've probably done less roleplaying over the last three months than I have in a long time. I don't want to say I don't miss it, but at the same time, it's been nice to get outside and do some typical summer things like go to the beach, have a barbecue, camp out over the weekend, find a girlfriend (a tall lass from Cork named Miriam). Yeah, I know—I'll try keep the fawning to a minimum. :)

But having done less roleplaying, I was intrigued by Dale Meier's comments regarding White Wolf in Interregnum #5. In his article, he questions whether or not the company is pushing their luck with their line

of dark roleplaying games. It's funny, but one of The Gamer magazine's early issues tackled the subject of dark roleplaying, too, and the opinions on the subject tend to get pretty heated. I can understand and sympathize with his trepidation over starting a flame war in the pages of Interregnum.



I grew up in a Lutheran environment myself, and I understand how someone might be cautious when it comes to playing games with more sinister themes. I remember a time

in college when I thought roleplaying itself was bad; it took a lot of time and effort, and took time away from pursuing "normal" activities, such as studying, going to parties

and chasing girls. Then things got really serious; I joined a Bible study. They never out-and-out told me it was wrong, but I soon got a more subtle hint that "anything that takes way from devotion to God should be avoided." I eventually felt guilty enough about it that I quit roleplaying during my junior year and didn't pick it up again until 1991.

The one thing I learned in that time was that it wasn't worth chucking a hobby I truly loved. I'm not knocking Christians here. What I am knocking is the church's attempt to police people's activities. It's up to us, as individuals, to determine what's healthy and what's not. That requires a certain amount of maturity that can only be gained through trial and error. You don't find out how bad poking your finger in an electric socket is until you've actually done it once. People can tell you not to dabble in the darkness until they're blue in the face, but experience is the real teacher in life.

And so it goes with White Wolf's games. I'm not a huge fan of White Wolf's stuff—most of it is overly melodramatic and pretentious—and yet the company has every right to be as obnoxious as it wants; it'll just have to face the social consequences. On the other hand, Chaosium has never had a problem with stores carrying their line of games, even though it includes such uplifting titles as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Elric*, and soon *Nephilim*. Could it be that maturity is the factor here rather than simple grimness of subject?

In White Wolf's defense, they are confronting issues many games avoid. The Republican party's philosophy—"ignore the

problem, maybe it'll go away"—is reprehensible at best, and the same applies in movies, television, literature and, yes, roleplaying. Many of the subjects aren't, and perhaps shouldn't be, discussed in polite conversation, and yet what happens when we encounter a situation that demands our attention? Should Luke Skywalker have turned his back on his evil father? Should he have avoided going with him to the Death Star because it was a immoral construction? The hero must walk a thin line between safety and the abyss, and sometimes that may involve crossing over into shadow for a period of time.

I realize that, in *Vampire* and *Werewolf*, the characters have crossed over more permanently. They are truly damned, and yet traces of their humanity linger on. How do those people deal with their dark side? Do they pretend it doesn't exist? Pretty hard to do when you have to kill people on a regular basis just to survive. The problem arises when you realize that you simply can't ignore the dark side of human nature—it will rise up to haunt you. If you keep it suppressed for too long, it may even decide to take over, and that's the point of no return, the point where pure evil takes over. I'll give White Wolf credit for acknowledging the dark, even if they're acting a little silly in doing so, and even if they step on a few toes.

### *What's So Funny?*

Humor in roleplaying is a tricky thing. Ever listen to a comedian who's trying too hard? It can be excruciating. The one time a friend and I played a game of *Paranoia*, it

ended up as an experiment in pain, as we watched the GM try horribly to work in lots of shtick. He kept trying to force us to laugh at the situation, and unfortunately, our sense of humor didn't match his. We were surprised, however, that other players thought it was very funny, and wanted to continue the campaign. They went on in later weeks to explore new heights of Three Stooge antics. Maybe we were sticks in the mud, but truth-to-tell, neither of us ever liked the Three Stooges.

On the other hand, a thickheaded and blustery clerk in a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure turned out to be very funny, perhaps because he wasn't planned beforehand. Of course, he was giving the PCs a hard time about carrying weapons and didn't believe any of their stories; add a little fundamentalist pompousness, and wala! Here was a character the PC's loved to hate. He came in a fit of spontaneity, and before we knew it, we were having one of the funniest *Call of Cthulhu* sessions we'd ever had. It also turned out to be one of the scariest—later, right in the middle of a bout of laughter, he was decapitated before the party's eyes. Not really funny, but it sure changed the tenor of the game and put players right back where they belonged—on the edge of their seats.

Okay, so I have a morbid sense of humor; anyone who read "Guardian Spirit" in Issue #4 already knows that. :) But what I'm really asking is, what is the purpose of humor in a game? Should it be the central focus or should it be something that comes naturally out of normal play? Obviously, I tend to lean more toward the latter; of course, those folks who went on with the *Paranoia* game had a lot of fun, so take what

I say with more than a grain of salt. If you're in the mood for Toon or the Rocky and Bullwinkle roleplaying game, *anything* serious might really seem irritating. Just remember that some of the funniest Monty Python skits had serious characters dealing with completely ridiculous situations. I imagine that if that *Paranoia* game had been something more than finding silly ways of killing each other's characters off, we might have had a better time.

### **Stargate: Sci-Fi Done Right?**

I was glancing through a recent issue of *Science Fiction Age* when I came across an article about the upcoming movie, *Stargate*, due sometime in November. For those who haven't heard anything about it, the story revolves around the discovery of an ancient teleportation device found in an Egyptian ruin. The government takes over the archeological operation when they find that the device is a gateway to another dimension/part of the galaxy, one that modern Egyptians now occupy. Some major political events are taking place on the technologically advanced Other Side, and the article goes on to describe the narrative as a mixture of *Star Wars* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. James Spader plays the Egyptologist, and Kurt Russell plays the government's military agent.

The statements that got me excited about the movie (I haven't yet seen previews) had more to do with approach to the storyline than the fact that it's a big-budget special effects epic. The first thing was the attention given to the story itself—the writers say they went to great lengths to

avoid explaining the entire background setting (anyone remember the pamphlets they handed out at screenings of *Dune*, or the cheesy narration in the original cut of *Blade Runner*?). They assumed the science fiction audience is intelligent enough to figure out what's happening, and let the events unfold naturally.

I'll digress a little. The rule "show, don't tell," is probably the one we hear most often, but forget first when it comes to putting it into practice. I made a big mistake in my early Harn campaigns by typing up a 25-page background for players to read before beginning. It explained all about the months of the year, the local coinage, and major historical events. It was boring as hell. Players who were enthusiastic at first were much less so after reading my tome.

Later campaigns worked much better when we started characters out in the setting and actually had the village storyteller whispering about the ancient devil dogs of the forest, and how they made off with miscreant children.

*Stargate*. The writers say they've actually drawn *characters* as opposed to cheesy archetypes. People are the center of this story, not the laser blasts, and the people possess hopes and fears outside getting through the next action sequence.

Finally, although technology plays a major part in the storyline, the writers chose to use a less common movie device—the transporter. This, in and of itself sounds interesting, simply because it tells me

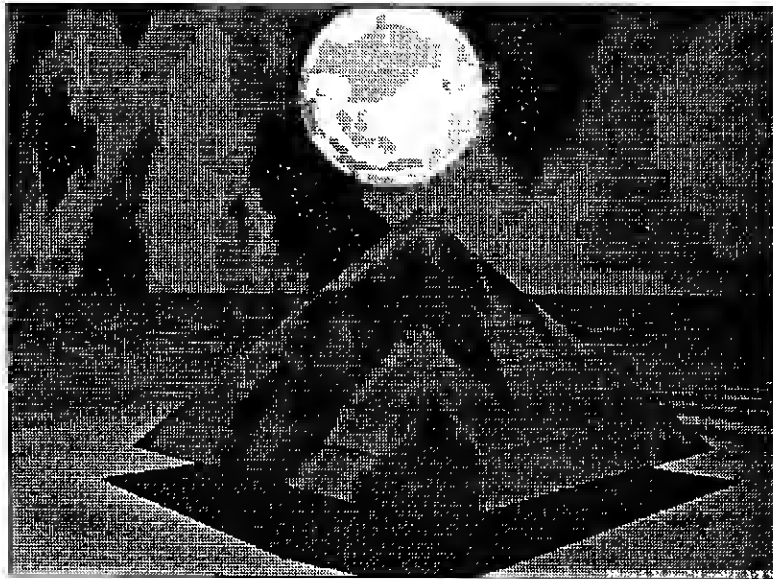
they've discovered there can be more to science fiction than space battles.

If my excitement proves unfounded and the movie turns out to be a dog, at least they have the right idea. I only hope that the intention

translates to a fantastic movie, because that can only mean more and better science fiction in the years to come. It will also—hopefully—carry over to the roleplaying world, where we're still learning that a fantastic setting cannot make up for a poor storyline; it can only augment a good one.

**More Movie Stuff**

Back to



If I seem to end up talking a lot about movies in a magazine that focuses on roleplaying, blame Doug Jorenby's article in issue #5— sorry, Doug! :) I agree wholeheartedly with his assessment that roleplaying draws on many genres, but also tend to defer to the cinema as the best representation of what roleplaying is like. Only movies can offer the sweeping camera shots, the globe-spanning plotlines, the visual sense of "being there." It's up close and personal in a way that television cannot match. Granted, shows like *Hill Street Blues* buck the TV trend, but it's still bound to a locale, and the one thing that I enjoy about roleplaying is that I got a chance to "travel" cheaply. :)

Pete's review of *The Mask* in issue #5 was interesting because it sort of matched the reasons why I chose not to see it, even before I read his article. I saw *Beetlejuice*; I saw *Roger Rabbit*. More than anything, they, along with *The Mask*, seemed designed to exhaust the audience with hyperkinetic activity. "Throw everything you can at the viewer and they'll have to laugh simply to keep up." No thanks; I prefer to laugh at my own pace, thank you. I gave *True Lies* a miss for the same reason.

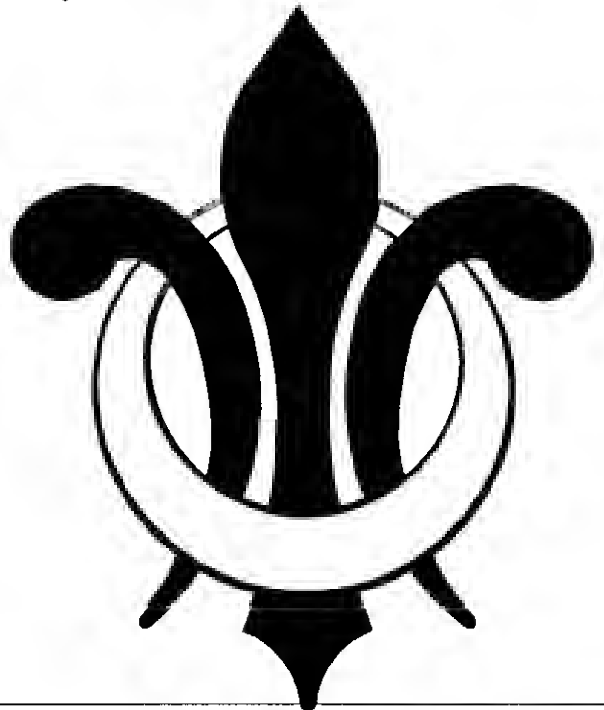
*Barcelona*, on the other hand, is both intelligent and funny. An excellent example of using the situation as comedy. Here, we have two characters—one who is an American salesman in Spain trying to get a handle on life (and women) and the other his less responsible cousin, a Navy officer recently stationed in Spain. The officer shacks up with salesman, and the two proceed to drive each other crazy and learn a thing or two in the process. Nothing in this

movie tells the viewer explicitly, "laugh," and yet this what you'll end up doing. A lot. The director of another funny sleeper, *Metropolitan*, has hit on something here.

*Natural Born Killers* is a typical Oliver Stone movie in that you'll either love it or hate it, depending on how much you like his previous stuff. It's frenetic, violent and in your face. As the movie progresses to over-the-top territory it actually becomes funny, in a rather disturbing way. It sinks into your skin and sticks with you after you've left the theater. I liked it, but then I also liked *Platoon*, *Wall Street* and *JFK*, so be forewarned.

### *A Story and a Warning*

Speaking of warnings, I'm going to foist a story on you this month. Ever wonder how a guinea pig feels? Now you know. :) See everyone next month!





## Interregnum #5

### The Log That Flies

Enjoyed reading your thoughts on live roleplaying. The extra work that goes into setting it up can pay off in ways that tabletop gaming cannot match. My one foray into IFGS was a lot of fun, if just for the feeling of cresting the top of an embankment and seeing a live "evil sacrifice" taking place in the pit below. The final battle was quite... exhilarating. :) • I'll add my 2 cents re: bringing food to a live game. Hiking around outside makes you hungry! • I'd love to see more scenarios that focus on human nature, especially ones that require PCs to use their knowledge of it to succeed in the adventure.

### Session Notes

Very intriguing ideas about the nature of roleplaying. I used to describe the hobby as "like a book, except the group—to some extent—gets to decide what happens next." Your conclusion that it's really a unique combination of all forms is right on the button. Of course, you'll always have people to disagree with you on the niggly stuff. :) • Interesting perspective on radio; one of the most riveting shows I ever "watched" was the BBC radio presentation of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. • re: "peeking behind the sets." One of the many difficulties for today's GM: keeping the players busy enough that they don't ask too many questions! :)

### Refugee

You're doing a good job narrowing down the (admittedly vague) reasons for my lack of enthusiasm for cyberpunk. The same heavies, and a certain "typical" backdrop for the action push me away from the genre.

### Who Is John Galt?

Enjoyed looking over Rator, the Issaries trader. How many years game time before he was retired?

### Shaphard's Pie

Welcome to Interregnum! I enjoyed your take on human nature. The knight is a wonderful prism to examine the human psyche, because they seem to represent the best human beings can come up with. Sir Bors is the most interesting of the lot, and I'm glad you told us more about him. He isn't what you'd expect of knightly behavior, but if you look closely, he represents the ideal almost too closely. • "...he was not wrong for not stopping his friends from murdering the farmers or seeking the truth. This was simply his personality." Such open mindedness! I'm glad there's people out there who don't try to run other people's characters for them. I used to hate hearing people say, "your

character's lawful good—ha can't do that!"

### Tales from the Electric Underground

Thanks for contributing, Dale; glad to have you on board, too. Hope my comments re: White Wolf aren't overly harsh—just throwing in my 2 cents worth. • Nice to have a *Star Wars* contributor; West End has done some interesting things with the universe, and I hope the game stays around long enough for the next trilogy. • Slicers are an interesting part of the universe—they never really detailed how the rebels got hold of the Death Star's plans or how they learned the Emperor would be on the new Death Star in *Jedi*, and Slicers seem to fit the bill pretty nicely. • I never thought of *Star Wars* as being a particularly technical universe, despite all the fancy gizmos; the fact they never bothered to explain how things worked in the movies made it strange to read your technical specifications. • Have you considered submitting to West End? • Also enjoyed your adventure ideas.

### Aye, Matey

The *Escape from Each Other* campaign really forces one to ask, "why am I with these guys?" Perhaps friendship wouldn't hold too much sway after being dragged around behind a horse for awhile. The easiest solution: ever hear of the Donner party? :) • Know of any other groups around Boston like the Twisted Metal Mo 4's? I've been looking for a local lousy beer-swilling association for quite awhile! • I am blissfully ignorant of the Iff-Biff Efreel. Remember that the next time we play. :) • Let me know when the R-rated version of the Advisor comes out. :)

### The Eight Track Mind

Was reading an article in *Time* magazine the other day re: APAs, and there was a reference to a zina with the same title as your own. There was a big difference, however, in that the subject matter was eight track tapes. :) • I haven't seen too many good examples of aliens for the same reasons that you describe in your article. The best alien I've seen is in—surprise—*Alien*. In that movie, the alien's principle instinct was to procreate; unfortunately for the crew of the *Nostromo*, the "alien" twist is that it uses other living hosts to give birth. Not coincidentally, the alien developed a violent, hunter tendency, because other creatures don't generally like to be used to create foreign babies.

## CLOUDS, LIKE SENTINELS

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Joseph was close to the top of the ravine when he stumbled, catching his foot on a bed of rocks. *They were still torturing him. Even here.* He tumbled down through rough pebbles and leaves, scraped his arms and face as he tried to break the fall. *They don't rest. It's useless to fight it.* Perhaps it was a leftover survival instinct, perhaps a faint glimmer of hope; it didn't matter. He reached up and caught hold of a thin tree trunk and jerked to a painful stop, even as the dirt cascaded past and continued down the steep incline. Further down, the Senate's dogs barked eagerly at the fresh sounds and smells.

They're close, Joseph thought. Why not just wait here, rest? No. It was just a few feet more. He forced himself to his feet again; his ankle was a twisted lump, but he goaded it forward, angry that he'd let himself fall so far. It might be enough to send him back to the death camps—he could hear them calling out to him, asking him to please come back. His lungs protested in the hot dusty air, but he re-worked his way, tree to tree, up the embankment. It was within reach again now, but this time he was careful to avoid the thin, sandy soil. In a surge that felt like rebirth, he stumbled onto the plateau.

The launch site was still there. It had become more overgrown than the last time he was here—cracks spread throughout the concrete, and rodent burrows appeared intermittently in the pitted asphalt. But even in the decay of the place, he'd walked onto holy ground. This was home. Runways stretched out to the horizon like massive fingers, and along the sides stood the towers, colossal stone tombs standing in distant rows, empty monuments to days long past. Workers were to stand atop the platforms and guide cargo modules onto the ships as passengers—Sleepers—underwent final examination.

"Yeah," murmured Josph bitterly. "They put them to sleep all right." The scale model they'd shown the Senate was comprised of six clean white medical buildings tied into a hub, web-like tendrils connecting each to the launch towers. We completed nearly two thirds of the construction before they shut us down. The bastards.

A distant human shout prompted him to creep along one of the runways, careful to avoid functioning sentries. Even though the project had been terminated over 16 years ago, there was still enough wariness of the place in the Senate to keep guards placed. Fortunately, the Senate was only slightly more organized than the barbarians they were fighting. The Hunger Wars kept most of their attention these days. It was a cruel fluke that he was

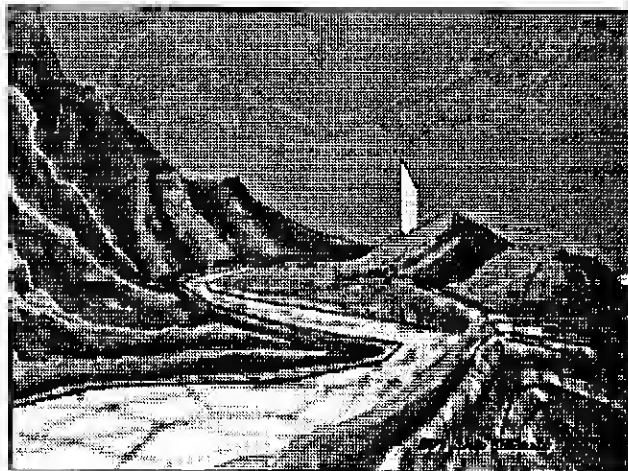
even being chased—his partner in escape was seduced at the last possible minute. John had divulged their escape plan all for a promise of time away from Stimulus. The fool. They'd maxed him as soon as they had information they needed.

The roar of screaming jets snapped Joseph out of his reverie and sent him scrambling back toward the treeline. The HumBee's insect-like shape streaked low over the forest and out over the plains, then slowed to

search mode, making a slow sweep over the buildings. Its three crimson scanners probed the crumbled ruins like a set of demonic fingers.

Joseph fought the planted urge to walk out into the lights, end the chase that moment. But why so relentless a pursuit? They knew he was ex-NSS, a simple engineer. The Senate knew everything about him. Even more. When the pain and pleasure became too intense, he'd learned to make up things. It didn't add up.

A sudden movement in the bushes caught Josph's ear, and he turned just in time to catch a glimpse of swaying leaves. They couldn't have climbed so far so fast. He edged along the forest, alternating between checking the progress of the 'Bee



and for movement behind him. The 'Bee itself was acting a bit strangely, as if it couldn't decide what search mode it was in.

Suddenly, there was a gurgling sound and the touch of something long and rubbery and slightly *electric* along his arm. Joseph gave a brief yelp as he was yanked off his feet. He looked down, but oddly, there was nothing visible constraining him. But there were more of the unseen appendages; slithering between his arms, his legs. He vaguely remembered a live snake he'd seen as a boy. The afternoon light seemed to quickly fade, like an unnatural dusk. And then, too soon, it was night.

\* \* \*

A man in old-fashioned spectacles peered down at him. His thin frame was shrouded in light, and for a moment Joseph thought he was in a Senate interrogation room. He tried to sit up, but it was as if the circulation of his entire body had, like a foot or a hand, been cut off. He winced at the numbness, but managed to adjust his eyes to the radiance. He sat, untied, in a large observation lounge—inside one of the launch pads? The afternoon sun hung low on the horizon, and through the vast windows, it drenched the entire room in brilliant, red-orange light.

"You didn't put up much of a fight, Mr. Wembley," said the thin man, who now looked less imposing. Even frail and sickly—his hair grew thin and patchy, his skin mottled with the pink stains of radiation.

"People don't generally fight well against the invisible," Joseph grumbled.

"Ah, so you do remember. We had thought you might have experienced some memory loss. Pu'tecn may have been a bit rough, but he thought the situation warranted it. You were almost caught, you know. They're still poking around out there, and they may be back in the morning."

Joseph felt the familiar pull on him, the urge to go back, tried to ignore it. "Who are you?"

The man chuckled. "Easy, friend. All will be answered soon. And who knows? You may avoid the Senate's version of hell yet."

From the rear of the lounge someone entered the room. Or actually—as Joseph looked back—something larger. The Si'meen lowered its long, sinuous frame through the doorway gracefully and twisted across the room. Joseph's mouth dropped involuntarily; he'd met the aliens once back when he was working here, but he never thought he'd

get the chance again. And this one had saved his life. It made some sense, too; the Si'meen were able to camouflage themselves to near invisibility; it could have been following him the whole time he was outside. Joseph tried not to stare as it stopped, hovering over the two like an elastic giraffe.

"Mr. Wembley has been remarkably cooperative, considering the welcome we gave him." He turned to Joseph. "Why don't we show you around."

"I'll sit if you don't mind."

The thin man smiled. "Fine. But eventually you'll want to see what we're doing here. My name is Vincent Mather. I was on the medical staff for the Corridor project, but now... Well, I have an aesthetic interest in this place." He smiled conspiratorially. "Something the two of us share, eh?"

Joseph ignored the question and gestured up at the alien. "The fact that he's here tells me you're still speaking to members of the Inner Corridor. The NSS is still illegal, though. How come the Senate hasn't shut you down?"

Mather stared grimly out the window. The HumBee was still out there, continuing its search along the perimeter of the forest. Calling. "The only reason we're all still alive is the Si'meen. They've given us the technology to mask our presence. The Hunger Wars have inadvertently helped, too. This is probably the lowest on their list of priorities right now, although lately, we've been seeing more activity out there."

Joseph glanced over at Pu'teen, who stood watching quietly. "Why?"

Mather turned around. His voice sounded weak, but his eyes were fierce, determined. "The Si'meen want to open the corridor again. There's talk that the earth may be granted a transfer point, that we might be reinstated in the IC. Not with the Senate, mind you. Us."

Joseph's heart skipped a beat, but he managed to control his voice. "You mean a simple outpost, right?"

"No. They're talking about full membership, the kind we planned from the beginning. They want to make earth a jump point, allow us to join the Family."

Joseph stood up. "Again, why? There's absolutely nothing to be gained. Earth's economy is wrecked. Nothing but constant wars over food and land. What can they possibly want from us?"

## Strange Sands

"It's not a cha-ri-ty mission, Joseph Wembley." The words bubbled forth from the depths of the small plastic translator strapped to the base of Pu'leen's neck. "The Si'meen view earth as a resource. And there are other reasons, though I cannot ex-pound on them here."

"A resource?" Joseph couldn't hold back the sarcasm. "You mean the Si'meen need soil full of nuclear radiation? Or perhaps some of the chemical agents the Senate has concocted...extremely painful, I hear."

The Si'meen's head swayed in puzzlement, but Mather broke in. "You'd be surprised at how little interest the Si'meen show in earth outside this place. It's the planet itself, the location they care about. Earth's wars are irrelevant."

Joseph couldn't hide the curious expression from his face, and Mather seemed to make a decision. "Why don't you see for yourself?"

Joseph stood. "What about that 'Bee?'"

Mather glanced out the window at the probing hovercraft and half-smiled. "We piped little subroutine into its search mode. Don't worry. It'll be busy looking for you for quite a while. Come on."

Joseph, reluctant to leave the sight of the 'Bee, followed Mather, who was beginning to look more like a sly school kid with something up his sleeve than a scientist. The Si'meen followed languidly. We've been able to divert the occasional trespassers in similar ways." They stopped at a bank of elevators, and Mather smiled as he pressed his hand up against a sensor panel. "We don't discourage Stargazers, though."

Joseph found himself grimacing at the term. "Stargazers?"

"Skywatchers, dreamers. People like you." Mather's chuckled. "And me. People who never forgot that we'd planned to go to get off this rock and out there with the rest of civilization."

Joseph didn't know why, but he suddenly

felt very guilty.

The doors opened to a massive steel-lined elevator. It was an older-style lift, but it had been modified somehow. The elevator descended through the tower, but when they reached the bottom level, it continued down past the reinforcing concrete. Then he realized what was different; the original plans didn't call for a drop this far. This was new construction. His ears popped as they dropped for a full minute.

Cool air wasjed over them as the doors hissed open, and Wembley stepped out onto a metal platform. Below stretched rows of strange machinery: colossal disks of oddly colored metal, mammoth pipes attached to oversized fittings, neatly positioned under chrome scaffolding. Workers

moved hastily under and through the rows, carrying tools, manning laser needles. It was the kind of place Joseph had once dreamed about. Long ago. Within the seeming chaos dwelled a sense of quiet calculation, and after a moment Joseph saw why. Moving unobtrusively, almost invisibly, along the balconies and occasionally onto the floor crept the Si'meen. They oversaw everything, like conductors in some bizarre orchestra.

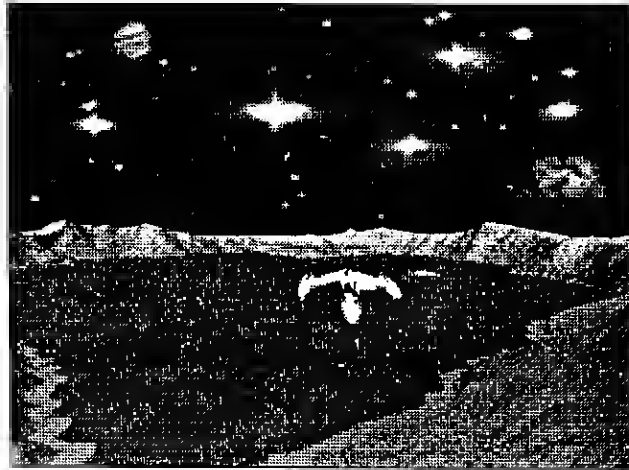
"They're ships, Wembley. This is only hanger 4 of 35, and with six ships per hanger, we'll soon have a small fleet, at least by IC standards. When earth cut off the funding, there were some of us who went on illegally. Those sleeper ships that were launched in the early 20's were fiascos, I know. But we kept at it down here, and the last sleeper we launched is still functioning. Those people are still alive."

"But these are warships."

Mather watched Joseph carefully.

"Earth was relatively safe from the Inner Corridor when we broke off contact," Joseph continued. "Who are we fighting?"

Mather looked across the hanger. The



## Strange Sands

Senate is planning to use nuclear weapons again." He paused. "At least this way, there'll be an escape route for those who don't wish to participate."

"And you're telling *me* this?"

"Why not. We've kept track of people who worked for the NSS. We knew you came here three years ago when you were still married. I'm sorry about what the Senate did to Cathy. We even tried to get her out of the camp after she was sentenced."

For the first time things weren't hazy or unsure; a hot poker of contempt shot through Joseph's chest. "I'm going to punch you."

Mather's mouth straightened into a thin line. "Go ahead. We want you back. If that's what it takes to convince you how serious we are, then do it."

Joseph trembled slightly at the invitation, glanced up at the Si'mean, who still waited patiently. "Never mind," he mumbled. He could feel the dullness of the Stimulator returning, almost more quickly than it had left.

Mather drew back. "Come on." Mather and the Si'mean led Joseph down a long, spotless hallway. They entered a room lined with full screen monitors and more equipment than Joseph had seen in years. Somewhere down inside was a strange wistfulness, but he couldn't bring it into focus. On one large screen, in brilliant resolution, a cloud billowed up from the ground, white smoke from a million angry furnaces. It looked like desert, but he wasn't sure if it was part of the blast or a result of it.

A narrator filtered in over the speaker; the voice sounded flat, dull. "The Senate began its testing today, demonstrating the capacity of new warheads in clear view of insurgents to the east. Senate members simultaneously announced that future uprisings will be restricted to practical implementation. Members were also pleased to announce that fighting broke off in Blue Sector 3 shortly after the test..."

"You see? They've already started. At least the war we fight down here will be worth fighting."

He gestured skyward. "It's up there, now. Earth is finished."

Joseph was vaguely sick as he broke away from Mather and stumbled out of the room. The metal smell from the underground hanger suffocated, but he escaped into an access stairway, at least it seemed so. No one followed as he climbed what seemed to be an infinite number of floors. Finally, he collapsed on a landing and threw up.

He awoke some time later to an inquisitive, gurgling sound. A Si'mean hovered above, swaying hypnotically in a kind of sad dance. Its fur stood on end indicating curiosity.

"No home?" It evidently had a less sophisticated translator than the one he'd heard earlier, or this one was less developed. It was hard to tell without examining the creature's underside.

"Right. Homeless."

It nodded, trying to mimic the human movement, but looking more like a clumsy snake than anything else. It swung its head around to look down the stairwell, then back at Joseph. "Family mine gone."

Joseph grimaced, puzzled. "Do you mean the IC?"

The creature only looked sad. "De-stroyed. Inner Corridor collapsed, war... gone."

The thought hadn't occurred to him. Earth had officially broken off contact with IC over 25 years ago. If there had been a war in that time, and these were the only remnants of the Family... It couldn't be just a coincidence that the Senate was testing nuclear devices now; maybe that demonstration was for more than just people in the south.

"Are there more of you...the Family...coming to earth? Are there survivors, moving out from the corridor?"

The Si'mean was agitated now, perhaps realizing it had said too much, but Joseph did not give up that easily. He seized the creature, even though he had little chance of hurting it. The action seemed to have the desired effect though, because the nervous alien burst out a litany of high pitched bubbling squeals.

"Survivors, Family...welcaveforpoints...north. Departforborder worlds."

"So why are you building warships? Has the theater shifted?"

"We...defend as we leave. Earth only habitable world on northern rim."

The stairwell seemed to shrink between them. The IC gone, and earth near to death. Even vast space felt small.

"I see you've met Pu'leen's daughter." It was Mather speaking as he trudged wearily up the stairs to join them. "You've got a lot of energy for a middle-aged man, Wembley," he said, sitting down.

## Strange Sands

"You managed to climb 22 levels. I'm beat."

"You're going to hit them first, before they have a chance to destroy this place."

Mather mopped his brow. "Not really. We're just preparing for the time when they will. We've constructed these hangers so that they'll survive the blast. The warships are for those members of the IC who still want the Si'meen dead, for whatever reason. You see, Wembley, we're tired of fighting. We want to explore life, not destroy it. Out there. We have a number of systems that we want to examine, but we don't want these things to follow us. You've already seen that earth will take care of itself. But the jump point the Si'meen are creating will be used only once, and then it will be destroyed. We'll be on our own. No looking back. We'll actually reach the sleeper worlds before those old colony ships arrive.

"But by carrying weapons, aren't you still inviting war? It's something that you can't just leave behind. You carry it with you."

"Have you noticed my skin? My hair? Does the fact that I am dying lessen my desire to keep living? Should the *potential* for disaster keep me from moving on? I have to believe there's equal potential that disaster *won't* reoccur, or I might as well lay down and die right now. When I told you about rejoining the Family, I was talking about the spirit, not the letter."

For a moment, Joseph saw himself standing in Mather's place. Had he made the same decision years ago, he might be in Mather's place. The only difference between them was that Mather had hope. A coldness crept over him as he realized how much the camps had affected him. He had died a long time ago. When they took Cathy. He wanted to believe in

the future, but he protected the status quo. He couldn't help it any more; it hurt too much to change.

Abandon earth completely? Why did it seem impossible? It had taken his wife from him, was trying to hunt him down as well. He shouldn't feel the slightest loyalty, and yet, there was nothing else. Not even this vision of Mather's. When it came down to it, earth was all he had any more—the sterility of the soil, the poison in the air, the camps. It was dying, but at least it was an old familiar patient, one he had grown accustomed to. He'd grown used to death, and used to fear. He looked up at Mather, who had been watching him intently. Seeing for the first time that there was nothing he could do. After a moment, Mather rose, much more wearily this time. He placed his hand on Joseph's shoulder, and

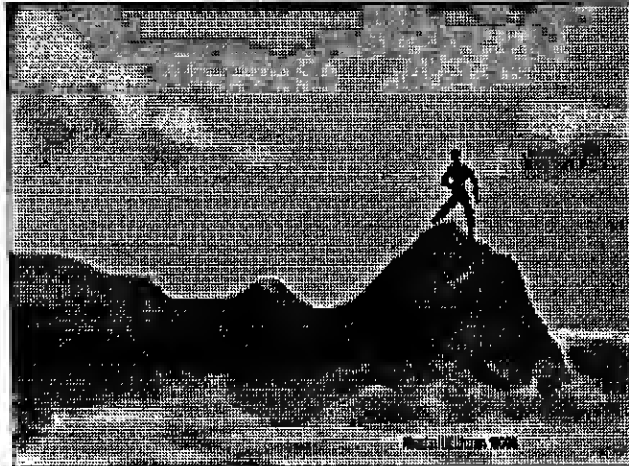
Joseph could feel himself trembling. "I'm sorry, Wembley," he said, his voice hoarse. "So sorry." He walked with the young Si'meen out the access door. Joseph sat down on the stairs and wept.

\*\*\*

From the observation deck, Joseph watched the flagship rise above what was left of the land. The horizon stretched over plains, infinite and unending, a great reddish expanse broken only by great

black thunderheads, poised like colossal guardians, barriers between the earth and sky. The ship climbed past the poisonous atmosphere into open space, joined shortly by others in groups of three. After a time, they were gone and the plains were again silent. Slowly he made his way down the stairs and outside, and felt his eyes drawn comfortably to the ground, right until the moment he felt the demon fingers of the HumBee stretch down in welcome. He was going home.

The End



# WHO IS JOHN GALT? #6

## Looters beware!

Curtis Taylor, 10655 Lemon Avenue #2404, Alta Loma, CA 91737-6961 / (909) 466-9327 / vingkot@aol.com  
 Glorantha is the creation of Greg Stafford. *RuneQuest* is published by The Avalon Hill Game Company. *RuneQuest* © 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984 by  
 Chaosium Inc. RQ Font © Oliver Jovanovic 1993. *Who is John Galt?* © Curtis Taylor 1994. The character John Galt is a creation of Ayn Rand.  
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Белорусская Республика

## RuneQuestCon 2

Contained below is the information you need to know to attend RQCon 2 as provided by Eric Rowe and Shannon Appel. As an attendee of RQCon in January of this year, I can tell you that this is not the convention to miss if you are a RuneQuest fan.

Here is the basic information needed to register for RQCon2, please read it thoroughly. Registration will **not** be accepted through e-mail. You must copy the form at the end of this information and send it in. The American distribution of Tales of the Reaching Moon will also have copies of this form. Please copy this lots and invite your friends.

**RuneQuest Con 2**  
**January 13-16, 1995**  
**San Francisco Clarion Hotel**

Guests of honor Greg Stafford, Sandy Petersen, Ken Rolston and the original authors of RQ: Steve Perrin, Ray Turney, Steve Henderson and Warren James.

Live-Action Glorantha Role-playing :  
The Broken Council and How the West was  
One; as well as other special live-action role-  
playing events.

Role Playing Events: RuneQuest, Ars-Magica, Skyrealms of Jorune, Call of Cthulhu, Pendragon, Elric!, Nephilim and more.

**Boardgames and Miniatures:** Dragon Pass, Nomad Gods, Pantheons and Miniatures.

Special Events: Trollball, Orlanthi Storytelling, Eat at Geo's, Costumes, Auction and lots of seminars by our guests on RQ, Glorantha and the other fine game worlds.

Our feature events are the following two live-action games...

How the West was One: The year is 1625 and it is time for the Seventh Ecclesiastical Council of Malkion at the University of Sog City. The prophet Notslor has called this council to try and unite the splintered factions of Malkionism. You play the part of an member of the council hoping to prove your version of Malkionism, avoid civil strife, and further your own career; all while the gathering clouds upon the horizon portend the growing evil of the nearby Kingdom of War. Will the West be One? (9 hours, 68 players.)

**The Broken Council:** Participate in the most important event of the first age of Glorantha: the creation of Osentalka, the perfect god who will herald the return of the Golden Age. From political infighting to terrible battles, the fate of Glorantha rests in the hands of the representatives to the Second Council in Dorastor. Players will be the great figures of Glorantha's past as they struggle to shape the future in the image of their personal beliefs. This is your chance to help create a god. (7 hours, 46 players.)

### Important Note:

It is very important to pre-register for this convention. Space in the two centerpiece live-actions is limited. Participation in the two LARPs will be determined by a random drawing to be held on Sept. 15. If there are still more spaces available afterwards, they will be given on a first come basis. Even if you do not want in one of the live-actions, after we get your registration we will send you the Convention packet in two to three weeks. It contains hotel information, events, gamemastering, volunteering and a questionnaire. By pre-registering you will be

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able to make sure we will be holding the events and seminars you want to attend. For more information or questions please contact us at...

e-mail :

rqcon@erzo.berkeley.edu

snail-mail :

RuneQuestCon 2

2520 Hillegas Avenue #101

Berkeley, CA 94704

voice:

(510) 649-8601 (Eric)

(510) 649-7467 (Shannon)

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**RuneQuest Con 2 membership form:**

Make your check or money order payable to Eric Rowe. Do not send cash.

\_\_\_\_\_ Full Membership \$30

\_\_\_\_\_ One Day (Sat. or Sun.) Membership \$15

\_\_\_\_\_ Featured LARP \$15. List which one here: \_\_\_\_\_. If I do not get into the LARP of my choice I would like to be in the other \_\_\_\_\_ [yes or no].

\_\_\_\_\_ Total enclosed.

Volunteers, gamemasters and those not getting into a LARP will get refunds at the convention.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail this form to:**

RuneQuestCon 2

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Berkeley, CA 94704

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**Lists and more Lists**

There are two card lists at the end of my zine; one is for the Magic: the Gathering expansion The Dark. The other is for the second Deckmaster game Iyhad. I am not sure if the Iyhad list is complete.



Please note my new snail-mail address at the top of this zine.

Just filler for this issue; I have been extremely occupied this month and was just involved in an automobile accident (the other driver ran a red light). I am OK, but my car is not drivable.

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Rare Cards

Aaron's Feeding Razor: Unique Equipment  
 Al's Army Apparatus: Master - Unique Location  
 Anarch Troublemaker: Unique Master  
 Arcane Library: Master - Unique Location  
 Art Museum: Master - Unique Location  
 Behind You: Combat  
 Betrayer: Master  
 Blood Puppy: Unique Master  
 Body of Sun: Combat  
 Brujah Justicar: Political Action  
 Burst of Sunlight: Combat  
 Business Pressure: Action Modifier  
 Cat Burglary: Action  
 Charnas the Imp: Unique Retainer  
 Conquer the Beast: Combat  
 Cunctator Motion: Political Action  
 Curse of Nitocris: Unique Master  
 Day Operation: Action Modifier  
 Distraction: Action  
 Eco Terrorists: Master - Unique Location  
 Entrancement: Action  
 Far Mastery: Action  
 Fists of Death: Combat  
 Flesh of Marble: Combat  
 Fragment of the Book of Nod: Unique Master  
 Freak Drive: Action Modifier  
 Gangrel Justicar: Political Action  
 Ghoul Escort: Retainer  
 Ghoul Retainer: Retainer  
 Giant's Blood: Master  
 Golconda - Inner Peace: Master  
 Hell Hound: Ally  
 High Stakes: Political Action  
 Hostile Takeover: Master  
 Immortal Grapple: Combat  
 Ivory Bow: Unique Weapon  
 Jackie Therman: Unique Retainer

J. S. Simmons Esq.: Unique Retainer  
 Kindred Intelligence: Action  
 Kindred Society Games: Master  
 Kine Dominance: Action  
 Madness Network: Unique Master  
 Magic of the Smith: Action  
 Malkavian Justicar: Political Action  
 Malkavian Prank: Master  
 Malkavian Time Auction: Master  
 Millicent Smith - Puritan Vampire Hunter: Unique Master  
 Monocle of Clarity: Unique Equipment  
 Mr. Winthrop: Unique Retainer  
 Murder of Crows: Retainer  
 Nosferatu Justicar: Political Action  
 Patagia - Flaps Allowing Limited Flight(Nosferatu): Action  
 Political Ally: Unique Ally  
 Praxis Seizure(Atlanta): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Boston): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Chicago): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Cleveland): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Dallas): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Houston): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Miami): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Seattle): Political Action  
 Praxis Seizure(Washington D. C.): Political Action  
 Psychic Projection: Action  
 Psychic Veil: Action  
 Pulled Fangs: Combat  
 Renegade Garou: Ally  
 Resplendent Protector: Retainer  
 Ritual Challenge: Action  
 Ritual of the Bitter Rose: Combat + Action Modifier  
 Rowan Ring: Unique Melee Weapon  
 RPG Launcher: Weapon  
 Rumors of Gehenna: Political Action  
 Sengir Dagger: Unique Melee Weapon  
 Smiling Jack the Anarch: Unique Master  
 Society of Leopold: Unique Master  
 Soul Gem of Etrius: Unique Equipment

Succubus Club: Master - Unique Location  
 Talbot's Chainsaw: Unique Weapon  
 Tasha Morgan: Unique Retainer  
 Telepathic Vote Counting: Action Modifier  
 Temptation of Greater Power: Master - Justicar  
 Thadus Zho (Mage): Unique Ally  
 The Embrace: Action  
 The First Tradition: The Masquerade: Political Action  
 The Knights: Unique Ally  
 The Slashers: Unique Ally  
 The Spawning Pool: Master - Unique Location  
 Toreador Justicar: Political Action  
 Tremere Justicar: Political Action  
 Vampiric Disease: Master  
 Ventruue Justicar: Action (Political Action)  
 XTC Laced Blood: Master - Out-of-Turn

### Uncommon Cards

Academic Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Aching Beauty: Master  
 Amaranth: Combat  
 Anarch Revolt: Master  
 Archon: Political Action  
 Arms Dealer: Ally  
 Assault Rifle: Weapon - Gun  
 Asylum Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Aura Reading: Combat  
 Backways: Master - Unique Location  
 Bastard Sword: Melee Weapon  
 Blood Bond: Action  
 Bloodhunt: Action  
 Bomb: Weapon  
 Brujah Frenzy: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Chainsaw: Weapon  
 Change of Target: Action Modifier  
 Chantry: Master - Unique Location  
 Charming Lobby: Action  
 Cryptic Rider: Action Modifier

Cultivated Blood Shortage: Master  
 Dawn Operation: Action Modifier  
 Delaying Tactics: Reaction  
 Disarming Presence: Action Modifier  
 Dragon Breath Rounds: Combat  
 Drain Essence: Combat  
 Dramatic Upheaval: Political Action  
 Eagle's Sight: Reaction  
 Elder Kindred Network: Reaction  
 Elysium-The Arboretum: Master - Unique Location  
 Fame: Master  
 Fast Hands: Combat  
 Flame Thrower: Weapon  
 Form of Mist: Combat  
 Game of Malkav: Master  
 Gangrel De-evolution: Master  
 Glaser Rounds: Combat  
 Grave Robbing: Action  
 Grenade: Weapon  
 Gypsies: Unique Ally  
 Homunculus: Retainer  
 Infernal Pursuit: Combat  
 Information Highway: Master - Unique Location  
 IR Goggles: Equipment  
 Kindred Restructure: Political Action  
 Kindred Segregation: Political Action  
 KRCCG News Radio: Master - Unique Location  
 Letter from Vienna: Master  
 Lextalionis: Political Action  
 Life Boon: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Loyal Street Gang: Ally  
 Major Boon: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Malkavian Dementia: Master  
 Manstopper Rounds: Combat  
 Mask of 1,000 Faces: Action Modifier  
 Masquerade Endangered: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Masquerade Enforcement: Political Action  
 Metro Underground: Master - Unique Location  
 Minor Boon: Master - Out-of-Turn

## Jyhad card list

Torn Signpost: Combat  
 Tragic Love Affair: Master  
 Undead Persistence: Combat  
 Uptown Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Vast Wealth: Master  
 Ventruue Headquarters: Master - Unique Location  
 Voter Captivation: Action Modifier  
 Vulnerability: Master  
 Walk of Flame: Combat  
 Warzone Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Weather Control: Combat  
 Well-aimed Car: Combat  
 Wolf Companion: Retainer  
 Zip Gun: Combat  
 Zoo Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location

### Common Cards

.44 Magnum: Weapon - Gun  
 Acrobatics: Combat  
 Aid from Bats: Combat  
 Ancient Influence: Political Action  
 Ancilla Empowerment: Political Action  
 Animalism: Master - Skill  
 Army of Rats: Action  
 Arson: Action  
 Ascendance: Master  
 Auspex: Master - Skill  
 Autarkis Persecution: Political Action  
 Bewitching Oration: Action Modifier  
 Blood Doll: Master  
 Blood Fury: Combat  
 Blood Rage: Combat  
 Blur: Combat  
 Bonding: Action Modifier  
 Boxed In: Combat  
 Brainwash: Master  
 Bribes: Action Modifier  
 Bum's Rush: Action

Mob Connections: Unique Master  
 Movement of the Slow Body: Action  
 Muddled Vampire Hunter: Unique Ally  
 Night Moves: Action  
 Nosferatu Putrescence: Combat  
 Obedience: Reaction  
 Outcast Mage: Ally  
 Owl Companion: Retainer  
 Parity Shift: Political Action  
 Police Department: Master - Unique Location  
 Powerbase-Chicago: Master - Unique Location  
 Powerbase-Washington D. C.: Master - Unique Location  
 Praxis - Solomon: Political Action  
 Psyche: Combat  
 Pulling Strings: Reaction  
 Pulse of the Canaille: Action  
 Rampage: Action  
 Raven Spy: Retainer  
 Reversal of Fortune: Political Action  
 Rotschreck: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Sabbat Threat: Political Action  
 Scorn of Adonis: Action Modifier  
 Skin of Night: Combat  
 Slum Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Society Hunting Ground: Master - Unique Location  
 Sport Bike: Vehicle  
 Spying Mission: Action Modifier  
 Stake: Melee Weapon  
 Storm Sewers: Master - Unique Location  
 Submachine Gun: Weapon - Gun  
 Sudden Reversal: Master - Out-of-Turn  
 Taste of Vitae: Combat  
 The Fifth Tradition-Hospitality: Action  
 The Fourth Tradition-The Accounting: Action  
 The Labyrinth: Master - Unique Location  
 The Rack: Master - Unique Location  
 The Second Tradition-Domain: Reaction  
 The Sixth Tradition-Destruction: Action  
 The Third Tradition-Progeny: Action

# Jyhad card list

Camarilla Exemplary: Political Action  
 Canine Horde: Combat  
 Cat's Guidance: Reaction  
 Cauldron of Blood: Combat  
 Celerity: Master - Skill  
 Claws of the Dead: Combat  
 Cloak the Gathering: Action Modifier  
 Computer Hacking: Action  
 Concealed Weapon: Combat  
 Conditioning: Action Modifier  
 Consanguineous Boon: Political Action  
 Consanguineous Condemnation: Political Action  
 Conservative Agitation: Political Action  
 Cryptic Mission: Action  
 Dead-end Alley: Combat  
 Deal with the Devil: Master  
 Deer Rifle: Weapon - Gun  
 Deflection: Reaction  
 Disguised Weapon: Combat  
 Disputed Territory: Action  
 Dodge: Combat  
 Domain Challenge: Political Action  
 Dominate: Master - Skill  
 Drawing Out the Beast: Combat  
 Dread Gaze: Reaction  
 Earth Control: Action Modifier  
 Earth Meld: Combat  
 Effective Management: Master  
 Elder Library: Master - Unique Location  
 Enchant Kindred: Action  
 Enhanced Senses: Reaction  
 Faceless Night: Action Modifier  
 Fake Out: Combat  
 Fast Reaction: Reaction  
 Flak Jacket: Equipment  
 Flash  
 Form of the Ghost: Combat  
 Fortitude: Master - Skill  
 Frenzy: Master - Out-of-Turn

Gird Minions: Master  
 Gleam of Red Eyes: Combat  
 Govern the Unaligned: Action  
 Growing Fury: Combat  
 Haven Uncovered: Master  
 Hawg: Vehicle  
 Hidden Lurker: Action  
 Illegal Search and Seizure: Master  
 Indomitability: Combat  
 Kine Resources Contested: Political Action  
 Laptop Computer: Equipment  
 Legal Manipulations: Action  
 Lost in Crowds: Action Modifier  
 Lucky Blow: Combat  
 Majesty: Combat  
 Mighty Grapple: Combat  
 Minion Tap: Master  
 Misdirection: Master  
 Movement of the Mind: Combat  
 Nimble Feet: Combat  
 Obfuscate: Master - Skill  
 Open Grate: Combat  
 Peace Treaty: Political Action  
 Political Backlash: Reaction  
 Political Flux: Political Action  
 Potence: Master - Skill  
 Presence: Master - Skill  
 Protean: Master - Skill  
 Protracted Investment: Master  
 Rapid Healing: Action  
 Rat's Warning: Reaction  
 Read Intentions: Combat  
 Regaining the Upper Hand: Political Action  
 Restoration: Action  
 Saturday Night Special: Weapon - Gun  
 Sawed-off Shotgun: Weapon - Gun  
 Seduction: Action Modifier  
 Shattering Blow: Combat  
 Short Term Investment: Master

## Jyhad card list

Sideslip: Combat		Uma Hatch	
Skin of Rock: Combat		Yuri - The Talon	
Skin of Steel: Combat			
Social Charm: Action			
Suprise Influence: Reaction			
Telepathic Counter: Reaction			
Telepathic Misdirection: Reaction			
Thaumaturgy: Master - Skill			
The Barrens: Master - Unique Location			
Theft of Vitae: Combat			
The Spirit's Touch: Reaction			
Threats: Action Modifier			
Thrown Gate: Combat			
Thrown Sewer Lid: Combat			
Trap: Combat			
Undead Strength: Combat			
Unflinching Persistence: Combat			
Unnatural Disaster: Master			
Vampiric Speed: Combat			
Vanishing from Mind's Eye: Combat			
Wake with Evening's Freshness: Reaction			
Wolf Claws: Combat			
<u>Vampire Cards</u>			
<b>BRUJAH</b>			
Angel			
Anvil	Primogen		
Appolonius	Primogen		
Bianca.			
Black Cat			
Crusher	Primogen		
Don Criez - The Idealist	Brujah Justicar		
Dre - Leader of the Cold Dawn			
Hector Sosa			
Lupo			
Miranda Sanova	Primogen		
Rake	Prince of Atlanta		
Tura Vaughn	Primogen		
<b>CATIFF</b>			
	Hasina Kesi		
	Igo - The Hungry		
	Navar McClaren		
	Nik		
	Smudge - The Ignored		
	Uriah Winter		
<b>GANGREL</b>			
	Anastasia Grey		
	Angus - The Unrulled		
	Badger		
	Basilia	Primogen	
	Bear Paw		
	Camille Devereux		
	Gitane St. Claire	Primogen	
	Giuliano Vincenzi		
	Gunther - Beast Lord		
	Quinton McDonnell	Primogen	
	Ricki Van Densy		
	Roman Alexander		
	Viam Andor		
	Wynn		
	Zack North	Primogen	
<b>MALKAVIAN</b>			
	Aleph		
	Brazil		
	Dancin' Dana		
	Didi Meyers		
	Dollface		
	Dr. Jest		
	Gilbert Duane	Primogen	
	Lucian	Prince of Miami.	
	Mariel - Lady Thunder	Malkavian Justicar	
	Normal		

## Jyhad card list

### Ozmo

Roland Bishop	Primogen
Roxanne - Rectrix of the 13th Floor	
Sylvester Simms	Primogen
Zebulon	

### NOSFERATU

Agrippina	
Chester DuBois	Primogen
Dimple	
Duck	
Ebanezer Roush	
Grendel - The Worm Eaten	
KoKo	
Lucretia - Cess Queen	Primogen
Marty Lechtansi	Primogen
Sammy	
Sebastian Marley	
Selma - The Repugnant	Prince of Cleveland
Sheldon - Lord of the Clog	Nosferatu Justicar
Tiberius - Scandalmonger	
Tusk - Talebearer	

### TOREADOR

Adrianne	
Andreas - Bard of Crete	Primogen
Anneke	Toreador Justicar
Anson	Prince of Seattle
Colin Flynn	
Delilah Easton	
Demetrious Slater	
Dieter Kleist	
Dorian Strack	Primogen
Elliott Sinclair - Virtuoso Thespian	
Felicia Mostrom	
Kallista - Master Sculptor	Primogen
Masika	
Ramiel Dupre	
Tatiana Romanov	Prince of Houston

### TREMERE

Astrid Thomas	Primogen
Cardano	Prince of Boston
Cassandra - Magus Prime	Primogen
Dr. John Casey	
Ignatius	
Jing Wei	
Justine - Elder of Dallas	Primogen
Lazarus	Primogen
Lydia Van Cuelen	
Merril Molitor	
Roreca Quaid	
Sabine Lafitte	
Sarah Cobbler	
Thomas Thorne	
Ulugh Beg - The Watcher	Tremere Justicar

### VENTRUE

Courtland Leighton	
Democritus	Ventruue Justicar
Emerson Bridges	Prince of Washington D. C.
Gideon Fontaine	
Heather Florent - The Opportunist	
Helena Casimir	Primogen
Jazz Wentworth	
Lucia Pacciola	
Melissa Barton	
Natasha Volfchek	Primogen
Roland Loussarian	
Rufina Soledad	
Sir Walter Nash	Prince of Chicago
Timothy Crowley	Prince of Dallas
Violette Prentiss	

# The Dark

**BLACK**

Ashes to Ashes	Unknown
Bog Imp	Unknown
Bog Rats	Unknown
Inquisition	Unknown
Marsh Gas	Unknown
Murk Dwellers	Unknown
Word of Binding	Unknown
Banshee	Rare
Curse Artifact	Rare
Eater of the Dead	Rare
Frankenstein's Monster	Rare
Grave Robbers	Rare
Nameless Race	Rare
Rag Man	Rare
Season of the Witch	Rare
The Fallen	Rare
Uncle Istvan	Rare
Worms of the Earth	Rare

**GREEN**

Carnivorous Plant	Uncommon
Gaea's Touch	Uncommon
Land Leeches	Uncommon
Marsh Viper	Uncommon
Savaen Elves	Uncommon
Scavenger Folk	Uncommon
Venom	Uncommon
Elves of the Deep Shadow	Rare
Hidden Path	Rare
Lurker	Rare
Niall Silvain	Rare
People of the Woods	Rare
Scarwood Bandits	Rare
Scarwood Hag	Rare
Spitting Slug	Rare
Tracker	Rare
Whippoorwill	Rare
Wormwood Treefolk	Rare

## WHITTE

Brainwash	Uncommon
Dust to Dust	Uncommon
Festival	Uncommon
Holy Light	Uncommon
Miracle Worker	Uncommon
Morale	Uncommon
Pikemen	Uncommon
Squire	Uncommon
Angry Mob	Rare
Blood of the Martyr	Rare
Cleansing	Rare
Exorcist	Rare
Fasting	Rare
Fire and Brimstone	Rare
Knights of Thorn	Rare
Martyr's Cry	Rare
Preacher	Rare
Tivadar's Crusade	Rare
Witch Hunter	Rare

BLUE

Deep Water	Unknown
Drowned	Unknown
Erosion	Unknown
Ghost Ship	Unknown
Giant Shark	Unknown
Riptide	Unknown
Sunken City	Unknown
Water Wurm	Unknown
Amnesia	Rare
Apprentice Wizard	Rare
Dance of Many	Rare
Electric Eel	Rare
Flood	Rare
Leviathan	Rare
Mana Vortex	Rare
Merfolk Assassin	Rare
Mind Bomb	Rare
Psychic Allergy	Rare
Tangle Kelp	Rare
<u>GOLD</u>	
Dark Heart of the Wood	Unknown
Marsh Goblins	Unknown
Scarwood Goblins	Unknown

RED

Fissure		Uncommon
Goblin Caves		Uncommon
Goblin Digging Team		Uncommon
Goblin Hero		Uncommon
Goblin Rock Sled		Uncommon
Goblin Shrine		Uncommon
Goblins of the Flarg		Uncommon
Ball Lightning		Rare
Blood Moon		Rare
Brothers of the Fire		Rare
Cave People		Rare
Eternal Flame		Rare
Fire Drake		Rare
Goblin Wizard		Rare
Inferno		Rare
Mana Clash		Rare
Orc General		Rare
Sisters of the Flame		Rare
<b>LAND</b>		
City of Shadows		Rare
Maze of Ith		Uncommon
Safe Haven		Rare
Sorrow's Path		Rare

## ARTIFACTS

<b>Baril's Cage</b>	Rare
<b>Bone Flute</b>	Rare
<b>Book of Rass</b>	Rare
<b>Coal Golem</b>	Rare
<b>Dark Sphere</b>	Rare
<b>Diabolic Machine</b>	Rare
<b>Fellwar Stone</b>	Rare
<b>Fountain of Youth</b>	Rare
<b>Living Armor</b>	Rare
<b>Necropolis</b>	Rare
<b>Reflecting Mirror</b>	Rare
<b>Runesword</b>	Rare
<b>Scarecrow</b>	Rare
<b>Skull of Orm</b>	Rare
<b>Standing Stones</b>	Rare
<b>Stone Calendar</b>	Rare
<b>Tormod's Crypt</b>	Rare
<b>Tower of Coireall</b>	Rare
<b>Wand of Ith</b>	Rare
<b>War Barge</b>	Rare

# Tales from the Electric Underground

Issue #2, Vol. 1

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Dale Meier  
308 South Hamburg Street,  
Holstein, IA 51025  
Internet: meierdalepau@bvc.edu

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### Corrections

Crazy Larry's Clearance Sale (Toon)

Tech Update (BattleTech)

Blind Drop (Star Wars)

### REVIEWS

"Cracken's Rebel Operatives" (Star Wars)  
"The Last Command Sourcebook" (Star Wars)

"Toon Ace Catalog" (Toon)

"Judge Dredd" #1 (DC Comics)

"Force Works" #1 (Marvel Comics)

"What If. . ." #64 (Marvel Comics)

*Another* Letter Jesus Might Write

### Commentary and Colophon

Battletech is copyright 1994, FASA; Star Wars is copyright 1977, 1994, Lucasfilm LTD.; Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game is copyright 1987, 1994, West End Games; Toon is copyright 1992, Steve Jackson Games; Judge Dredd is copyright 1994, DC Comics and Fleetway Editions Ltd; Force Works, Iron Man, and What If. . . are copyright 1994, Marvel Comics; Underground is copyright 1994, MGI. Use of these trademarks or terminology related to them is not a challenge to the respective copyrights.

## CORRECTIONS

In the last issue of *Tales from the Electric Underground* I made a slight error in my editorial ("Has White Wolf Gone Too Far?"). I said that the title of White Wolf's new RPG is *Wraith: The Death*. The actual title of the game is *Wraith: The Oblivion*. I have also reworded my editorial policy a bit. Also, Pete alerted me to a printing glitch on the second page. Evidently my printer didn't print part of one line, breaking the continuity between pages one and two. I managed to send the necessary corrections to Pete through e-mail in time for the promo issues and subscribers will receive a corrected page with their next issue.



# CRAZY LARRY'S CLEARANCE SALE

Hey! Are you tired of using the same old gag or gadget? Broke because you spent your last dollar on that special gadget that flopped at a critical moment? Then come to Crazy Larry's Clearance Sale! I've got everything a toon could ask for--guns, gadgets, and more--ALL AT EXTREMELY LOW PRICES!!!!!! BWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!!!

## Instant Disaster Pills

Price: \$15 for a bottle of 25; \$30 for a bottle of 50

These pills let you create a disaster everywhere you go! Just hit one really hard and, voila! One disaster to go! Disaster pills come in four different types: thunderstorm, tornado, earthquake and flood. One word of warning. When the pill bottles were labeled, some of the labels got mixed up. When a toon uses these pills, make a Yes/No roll to see if the pills are correctly labeled. If the pills were mislabeled, pick another pill type, or worse yet, pick a different pill type *for each pill used*. For some strange reason, these pills never seem to work on a toon's natural enemies. A *Read/Write* roll reveals small print on the label saying, "These pills will not work on [natural enemy]." After a pill is struck, the user should make a *Dodge* roll to avoid being caught in the resulting disaster. Warning: Instant disaster pills should not be taken internally. If someone is actually stupid enough to do this, they suffer double damage and other side effects. The effects of each pill lasts 1d6 turns.

**Thunderstorm:** When these pills are struck, they release a small but powerful thunderstorm, complete with lightning and thunder. The storm will hover over the nearest character and rain on them for 1d turns. At the Animator's discretion, the storm will fire off a lightning bolt (roll as if the storm has a *Fire Gun* skill of 6) which causes 1d+3 points of damage to anyone under the cloud. If the pill is taken internally, the character will take double damage from the lightning and within 2 turns they will begin to bloat from the rainwater. The character takes a point of damage from the swelling until the storm dissipates, the toon runs out of hit points or until someone pokes (or shoots) a hole in them. If the character runs out of hit points or if someone pokes a hole in the him or her, the character Falls Down in a torrent of water which causes 1d of damage to everyone caught in the flood.

**Tornado:** This pill creates a small tornado which sucks up everything in its path. Characters must make a *Dodge* roll or be sucked up into the funnel for 1d of damage. As an added bonus (if you can call it that), the Animator can make a Yes/No roll to see if hail is present. If it is, characters who are sucked up into the funnel may take another 1d of damage from the hailstones. If taken internally, the toon is whirled around, crashing into objects at random and taking double damage from the the tornado and the hail (if it is present).

**Earthquake:** These pills create a massive earthquake. Any toon caught within a 10 meter radius has to make a *Zip* roll to stay standing, avoid taking damage from falling rocks (1d damage) or avoid falling into crevasses (2d damage). If taken internally, the toon suffers 1d damage from being bounced around and normal damage from anything that falls on him or her. The toon's bouncing may also wreak havoc on the area and other toons around them (opening up crevasses, causing rocks and even parts of cliffs to fall, etc).

**Flood:** Flood pills are simply capsules of highly concentrated, dehydrated water (see pg. 57 of the Toon rulebook). When struck, the pill crumbles to dust, but if you get the pill or its dust wet, watch out! Adding even a drop of water to the pill will cause a massive flood. If taken internally, the toon suffers 1d damage from the water.

## Dehydrated Meals

Price: \$15 for a bottle of 25

Description: These pills are just the thing for those long journeys into space, the dungeon, or wherever else toons go to get into trouble. When re-hydrated, the pill expands to create a full meal, complete with dishes and silverware (the type of meal is up to the Animator and maybe even the player) ranging from fast food to gourmet. However, like the disaster pills, some of the bottles were mislabeled and so a Yes/No roll is required to see if this is the case. If the bottle was mislabeled, a gourmet meal might turn into something mundane (like meatloaf) or the toon's favorite food may turn out to be something he or she hates (like calamari in a white wine sauce or something worse). Likewise, a pill labeled as something truly disgusting may turn out to be the toon's favorite dish. If a pill is taken internally, the toon gets a bad case of gas, indigestion, or worse yet, heartburn, and takes 1d of damage. Taking more than one pill internally is not a good thing and causes 1d of damage times the number of pills eaten.

## Incredibly Stupid Special Effects (a shtick)

Price: Not exactly for sale

Duration: 1 Turn

WARNING: This shtick should be used on Animator's discretion only, and only if the players and the Animator are prepared for any weirdness that might occur because of its use.

Description: Finally--a schtick for Toons who detest the sight of blood (especially his [or her] own). This schtick allows a Toon to make a special effect (noises, etc) appear when he or she gets into a fight. Rolls for this shtick are resolved normally. A special effect will appear (such as "Pow!" if the toon hits his or her opponent, or "Swish!" if the toon misses) regardless if the roll is successful or not. If the target doesn't Fall Down he or she has the option of using the shtick against the user (e.g. grabbing the "P" off of "Pow!" and hitting his or her opponent with it).

# TECH UPDATE

Mass: 70 tons

Chassis: Strider 100

Power Plant: 250 Magna

Cruising Speed: 44 kph

Maximum Speed: 65.3 kph

Jump Jets: None

Jump Capacity: None

Armor: Leviathan Plus

Armament:

One Gatecrasher Class-20 Autocannon

One Brightstar Large Laser

Two Viper Small Lasers

Three Vindicator Medium Lasers

Manufacturer: Strider Armaments Corporation

Communications System: OptiComm 3500

Targeting And Tracking System: OptiComm Warlord 2500

Type: THM-10A Thunderhammer

Tonnage: 70Tons

Internal Structure:

Tons

70

7

Engine:	250 Magna	Tons
Walking MPs:	4	12.5
Running MPs:	6	
Heat Sinks:	17 (10 hidden, 7 extra)	7
Gyro		2.5
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	216 (standard armor)	13.5
	Int. Structure	Armor Value
Head:	3	9
Center Torso:	22	29/18
Rt./Lt. Torso:	15	30/18
Rt/Lt. Arm:	11	15
Rt./Lt. Leg:	15	17

### Weapons, Ammo and Equipment

Type	Loc.	Critical	
AC/20*	LA	10	14
Ammo (AC/20, 5 reloads)	LT	1	1
CASE	LT	1	.5
Large Laser	RA	2	5
Medium Laser	LT	1	1
Medium Laser	CT	1	1
Medium Laser	RT	1	1
Small Laser	CT	1	.5
Small Laser	RA	1	.5
Heat Sinks	H	1	1
	LT	3	3
	RT	3	3

\*—Because of space taken up by the AC/20, the Thunderhammer has no hand or lower arm actuators in the left arm and is unable to punch with this arm.

**Overview:** A rip-off of the Warhammer in some aspects, the Thunderhammer is one of a few little known design impostors which popped up in the late 3020's. The Strider Armaments Corporation was notorious for using corporate espionage to create new and sometimes unusual 'mech designs, mainly because of severe budget constraints, a low profile in the market for military hardware and a lack of creativity among its design staff. In 3030, the Lyran Commonwealth looked to Strider for a 'mech with the same speed and strength as a Warhammer, but with greater maneuverability and heavier weapons for close fighting. The company contacted one of its moles in StarCorp and ordered her to take holovids of the specs for the WHM-6R Warhammer, one of StarCorp's most popular 'mechs. Capitalizing on the strengths of the Warhammer, the designers performed some "editing," stripping the design of all weapons and its engine in order to avoid being accused of patent law violations. However, StarCorp executives later caught Strider's mole. The spy confessed and StarCorp ordered Strider to destroy all plans based on existing and projected StarCorp 'mechs or face a lawsuit. Strider refused and subsequently lost their contract with the Lyran Commonwealth. Only ten Thunderhammers were built and out of those ten, only six are operational.

A Thunderhammer bears some resemblance to a Warhammer, except that the 'mech lacks a Holly SRM-6 rack and has a large laser and AC/20 on the right and left arms respectively rather than a PPC on each arm. In the confusion of battle, some mechwarriors have confused the two 'mechs. StarCorp's lawsuit was based on the "look and feel" defense of the ancient *Apple v. Microsoft* lawsuit.

**Capabilities:** Although the Thunderhammer is a rip-off of the Warhammer, it has significantly different mission parameters. Because the Thunderhammer lacks a missile system and has only one long range weapon (a large laser), it specializes in close combat. 'Mechwarriors closing in for an easy kill usually receive a nasty surprise when Thunderhammer pilots open up with the AC/20 and/or the three medium lasers. However, the heat from the Thunderhammer's weapons are its biggest drawback. Possessing only 17 heat sinks, the Thunderhammer may quickly overheat and suffer targeting problems when all five of its weapons are fired at once. Due to the 'mech's heat problems and the danger of storing the AC/20's ammo in a torso section, Cellular Ammunition Storage Equipment (CASE) was added to protect the pilot and the 'mech in the event of an ammo explosion.

**Variants:** Because of the Thunderhammer's tendency to heat up after prolonged combat, some techs strip the 'mech of all its heat sinks and replace them with double heat sinks. Due to the bulkiness of double heat sinks, this requires the heat sink in the head to be moved to the left torso. Beyond this modification, there are no other known variants of the Thunderhammer.

### Notable 'Mechs and MechWarriors:

#### Colonel Geoffrey Anderson

Commander of the Bloodhawks mercenary company, Anderson won his Thunderhammer, *Mjolnir*, in a battle with Capellan forces during the Lyran Commonwealth's Aylar campaign. During a raid on Kentares, Anderson was ambushed by a Kurita Warhammer which was hidden in an old building. Thinking the Lyran 'mech was going to be an easy kill, the Kurita mechwarrior brought his Warhammer in close, only to receive a pounding from *Mjolnir*'s AC/20. The shots set off an explosion in the Warhammer's SRM rack, crippling its targeting computer and damaging its reactor. Not to be dishonored, the Kuritan charged his 'mech's remaining PPC and fired, melting some of the Thunderhammer's armor, but causing no substantial damage. Anderson took his 'mech toe-to-toe with the crippled Warhammer and delivered a crushing blow to the enemy 'mech's cockpit.

**Mass:** 100 tons

**Movement Type:** Surface Naval (Displacement Hull)

**Power Plant:** 270 GM I.C.E.

**Cruise Speed:** 35 kph

**Flank Speed:** 55 kph

**Armor:** Leviathan Aquarius

**Armament:**

One Thunderhawk Gauss Rifle

One Cat's Eye Anti-Missile System

**Manufacturer:** NavTech Unlimited

**Communications System:** ComTek 3000

**Targeting and Tracking System:** NavTrak Tigershark, Mk. II

Type: River Rat Naval Transport	Tons
Movement Type: Surface Naval (Displacement Hull)	
Tonnage: 100	100
Cruise Speed: 3	
Flank Speed: 5	
Engine: 270 GM I.C.E.	29
Lift Equipment	0
Power Amplifier:	0
Heat Sinks:	0
Internal Structure:	10
Front/Rear: 10	
Left/Right: 10	

Turret:		Tons
Armor:		2
		6
	Armor Factor: 96 (conventional armor)	
	<u>Location</u>	<u>Points</u>
	Front	19
	Lt/Rt. Side	19/19
	Rear	19
	Turret	20

#### Weapons, Ammunition and Equipment

<u>Type</u>	<u>Facing</u>	<u>Tons</u>
Gauss Rifle	Turret	15
Ammo (Gauss, 8 rounds)	Turret	1
Anti-Missile System	Turret	.5
Ammo (AMS, 12 rounds)	Turret	1
CASE	Turret	1

**Overview:** One of a few commercially produced patrol craft, the River Rat has served in countless amphibious assaults. Designed in 3029 for the Free Worlds League, the River Rat proved its worthiness in by offering landing force a substantial amount of protection with the ship's Gauss rifle and anti-missile system. The River Rat is commonly used to carry small tanks, hovercraft, infantry and even 'mechs to landing sites and offer fire support for ground and naval forces.

**Capabilities:** Like all other standard vehicles, the River Rat takes advantage of the fact that it doesn't need heat sinks because of its projectile weapons. The River Rat was constructed for the Free Worlds League Army (hereafter called the FWLA) after military commanders voiced a need for a landing craft capable of giving adequate fire support to ground and naval units. To deal with enemy units using missile racks, the River Rat utilizes a Cat's Eye anti-missile system. Although the River Rat can fend off missile attacks and inflict massive damage on enemy units, it cannot do so forever. Ammo storage is limited by the space taken by CASE and the ship's cargo. The FWLA has used the River Rat on several occasions, including a recent raid on the water rich world of Kaiser's Folly in the Periphery. In each raid the River Rat proved to be a worthy opponent for any enemy unit--ground or naval. Unfortunately, not all of the raids allowed all of the ships to come through unscathed. In a raid on the Steiner world of Skye, one River Rat sank after Steiner hydrofoils managed to blow up the transport's main ammo magazine and cargo bay with SRM salvos. The CASE in the ship's turret saved the ship from major damage, but left it defenseless. Several minutes later the River Rat's captain found himself facing three more hydrofoils, each one gunning for the transport's cargo bay. The captain ordered the hovercraft on board to be deployed, but a lucky SRM shot destroyed the first hovercraft in line, trapping the rest inside. Taking advantage of the open cargo bay, the other two hydrofoils fired into the opening, causing the massive internal damage and sinking the transport.

## BLIND DROP

In the Alliance Intelligence network, it is normal for agents to make a "blind drop" in which one agent leaves information or contraband in an inconspicuous spot for an unknown contact. In all cases, the information or contraband are vital to resistance efforts. The following messages are adventure hooks for use with Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game. For example, the fifth message indicates that it may have been sent by an old assassin droid because it mentions "Republic Intelligence Central," the elimination of primary targets on Caprioril and a shortage of power and supplies. But who or what are

the "secondary targets" and why is the transmission garbled at the end? Secondary targets could be anybody or anything--relatives of the PCs or an Imperial (or Rebel) base. The garbled ending could be the result of a power surge or other malfunction suffered by the droid. All of this is left to the discretion and imagination of the GM. Adventures do not necessarily have to take place in the sector or area of space where the message originated. Not all of the messages were acquired through a blind drop. Some are intercepted (and often decoded) Imperial or Corporate Sector Authority transmissions; others are messages sent between Rebel or Imperial spies or sympathizers in corporations or crime and bounty hunter syndicates. Messages sent between Alliance agents (using pseudonyms) are always left encoded. When trying to decode any Alliance messages, it is recommended that you use the slang keys on page 26 of "The Rebel Alliance Sourcebook" and pages 17-20 of "Galaxy Guide 9: Fragments from the Rim." Readers who do not have either sourcebook are welcome to write to me for a translation.

**TO:** Fedris Dorn, Fendiri Computer Corporation, Kibrinol IV  
**FROM:** Vanthis Kell, KDY warehouse, Kibrinol V  
**COMCODE:** CorpCour Hc29dv1ß

Tell Mother we have a 5 chicken alarm and our vacc suit may be busted. If worse comes to worst, expect an easy extraction of our brass mine. Should any birdwatchers show up, vaccinate with discretion.

**FROM:** Thadriall Ven, Intelligence; Infiltration  
**TO:** Nimh Kethran, Intelligence; Infiltration--Ventooine/4  
**SUBJECT:** New assignment  
**CONFIRMED:** SEND; TRAN45/50; RECV  
**CONTEXT:** 50E50; AMAN; PERS; RMAN;  
**PHASECYCLE:** PSEG3456855645865925768; SCAN; 1:23:00:00BMUT; 00:40RMUT

Military forces on Vedan indicate that terrorist activity is increasing. Evidence points to a resistance group calling itself the "Vedani Allied Army." You are hereby ordered to shut down operations on Ventooine and take any essential personnel and equipment with you to the Vedan system in Trebela sector. Your replacement has been advised of the situation on Ventooine and is fully prepared.

**FROM:** Garrison Æ134, Bindari system/ Al'Nasrl sector  
**TO:** All Imperial Naval and Army units/ Al'Nasrl sector  
**PRIORITY:** LEVEL ONE

EMERGENCY TRANSMISSION\* \* \*EMERGENCY TRANSMISSION\* \* \*EMERGENCY TRANSMISSION

We have experienced an accident in one of our science labs. All safety precautions are being taken. To insure military control of this system, three system patrol ships (INS *Talon*, INS *Warhammer* and INS *Dominion*) have been scrambled and the system borders have been closed indefinitely under General Order XR349ß. Any civilian or corporate ships attempting to enter the Bindari system will be subject to search and seizure or possible destruction. Communication will not be accepted. Bindari garrison goes off the air immediately. Long live the Emperor. Communication ends.

**FROM:** Inarez Velac, Tierfon/Sumitra  
**TO:** Mother Pradan, SectCom/Tharan IV/Sumitra

Intelligence network on Kaydren is now toxic and has been orphaned. One dumb orphan left on Kaydren by accident. Recommend immediate extraction. Be advised, orphan is a member of the Hundred Club and extraction will be easy due to a garrison of plastic soldiers and several cute BHs.

Suspect one BH involved may be Great Uncle Boba.

FROM: Operative Ev1-Delta  
TO: Republic Intelligence Central  
PRIORITY: LEVEL TWO

Primary targets on Caprioril eliminated. Standing by for further instructions. Power and supplies running low. If orders are not received within 48 hours, will acquire necessary supplies and initiate elimination of secondary targets located in Sector 242. Will apprise Centv. ¶\$rkfr134.¶\$∞fç`ti650 p[6]"/=55+-984nø ·\$°\$√¶[ç~¶[çç°\*0 ----- ¶¶¶¶1,6900a58590w0 ¶¶¶°·\$ vc94°4cx8754xx8¶¶∞ç·∞ç·ç· ¶¶9708..... åß°@f~Ω~°@fð\$0876096n;]lkjgn;f;KJN;hl===

>>[Sektor 242 NewsLine/GX892/E242/RolfN/Live Holocaust-->Sheylad Minor/Sarin]<<

"Citizens and planetary officials are baffled at the third in a series of mysterious murders on Sheylad Minor. Earlier this morning, Moff Miyan Thandril was found dead in his suburban home. Officials were notified of the murder by the Moff's son, who was quoted as saying, 'I hope they find the drashig who did this and teach them the meaning of Imperial justice.' Although nothing of importance was stolen, Imperial authorities refuse to comment and are treating the case as an assassination by members of the Rebel Alliance.

"Earlier this week, officials began investigating the murders of Reyas Taandari, a local customs inspector, and the head of Sheylad Minor's government, Precentor Fenral Velari. Currently, local officials are unsure if there is a connection between the three murders and as I said before, Imperial authorities refuse to comment on the murders. Local authorities speculate that the murders are the work of a malfunctioning assassin droid, but they aren't ruling out the possibility of the Rebellion's involvement.

"From the Governor's Estate, this is Rolf Nathard reporting for Sektor 242 NewsLine."

## REVIEWS

PRODUCT: "Cracken's Rebel Operatives"  
AUTHOR(S): Paul Balsamo et.al  
SYSTEM: Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, 2nd edition  
STOCK NUMBER: (WEG)40084  
PRICE: \$15.00  
PAGE COUNT: 96 pages, softcover

Are your PCs looking for a connection in the Sullustan underground? Do they need to break into the local Imperial garrison, but can't afford the "service fees" of the slicer at the local bar? "Cracken's Rebel Operatives" gives GMs a look at a few of the many personalities behind the Rebel Alliance's intelligence network. This book is an excellent source for NPCs, should a GM have a hard time creating NPC agents to assist (or maybe even hinder) his or her players. Agents range from the schizophrenic Graf Yonna to the lovely but ruthless Rivoche Tarkin (niece of the late Grand Moff Tarkin) and each agent has a background write-up, RPG stats and a personal addendum from General Cracken himself. Although all are loyal to the Rebellion, a few, such as Bonic Tarracus, have "lost their way" one or more times. I was somewhat disappointed to see that the authors had missed one very important Rebel agent--Tiree (the NPC agent featured in the 1st edition rulebook's introductory adventure). The artwork varies from page to page as different characters were assigned to various artists on the West End Games staff. I was pleased to see that this is one of the first sourcebooks which doesn't suffer from

Allen Nunis's annoying black and white artwork (his color artwork is excellent, however). The editing in the book is very well done, but a few grammatical errors pop up from time to time.

Although adventure hooks are not an explicit, GMs can pick up some interesting ideas from the backgrounds of the agents. The only problem with this sourcebook is that a majority of the agents (some of them disillusioned Imperial officers) cannot leave their present location, meaning the PCs must be brought to them through the course of an adventure or campaign. However, this does not make the sourcebook a total loss. GMs are encouraged to "drop names" from time to time or use the stats in the book as templates for other operatives. In "The Rebel Alliance Sourcebook," "Galaxy Guide 9: Outer Rim Territories" and "Cracken's Rebel Field Guide" we get a good look at how Alliance Intelligence is set up and what kind of gadgets agents can use or jury rig, but "Cracken's Rebel Operatives" gives the network real personality.

**PRODUCT:** "The Last Command Sourcebook" (Based on the novel "The Last Command" by Timothy Zahn)

**AUTHOR(S):** Eric Trautmann

**SYSTEM:** Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, 2nd edition

**STOCK NUMBER:** (WEG)40059

**PRICE:** \$22.00

**PAGECOUNT:** 141 pages (excluding three pages of advertisements), hardcover

**WARNING:** *Fans, players and GMs who have not read "The Last Command" should read it before reading this review.*

After waiting through two production delays and the time it took to get my copy through the mail, I can honestly say that I now know how the Emperor created Luke's clone. The third book in the Zahn trilogy, this sourcebook covers the events, equipment and characters in "The Last Command." Although this book is a bit redundant in the character stat and equipment areas, it is the best written of the three. The first two seemed to be extremely redundant as they repeatedly listed character stats, Force powers and equipment which previously appeared in the 1st and 2nd edition rulebooks and other sourcebooks. "The Last Command" sourcebook covers the events in the novel and their effects on the various characters and alien species listed in the sourcebook from a historical perspective (written by New Republic historian Voren Na'al) along with new pieces of equipment. Another difference between "The Last Command" and the other two sourcebooks, this one lacks a chapter on the Force (the only Force power listed is the "Force Scream"). I found the tactics chapter to be very interesting as it brings a bit more life to the battles both in the novels and in the RPG. However, the best part isn't the chapter on tactics—it's the chapter devoted to Mount Tantiss. The Emperor's headquarters/trophy vault is described in full detail (with maps) from the throne room to the Spaarti cylinders and even the cloning process itself. Like "Cracken's Rebel Operatives", the artwork was done by several different artists all of whom did a very good job in creating character images (although some will undoubtedly differ from the reader's perception). You don't need to play in the "New Republic" era to use these sourcebooks; each NPC's background is good enough to let a GM use him, her or it in a campaign or adventure set during the movies.

Even though this is the best sourcebook in the trilogy, I still agree with a lot of other players and GMs who say West End Games should have waited to produce all three as one sourcebook. Regardless of that fact, "The Last Command" sourcebook is definitely worth the wait and the price.

**PRODUCT:** "Toon Ace Catalog"

**AUTHOR(S):** Robert "Doc" Cross, Craig Stockwell, and Leonard Loos

**SYSTEM:** Toon

**STOCK NUMBER:** (SJG)7606

**PRICE:** \$20.00

**PAGECOUNT:** 204 pages, softcover



In 1984, Steve Jackson Games released *Toon*, the first cartoon RPG. The original game was covered by four 64-page rulebooks, each one selling for \$5.00. In 1992, SJG revised *Toon* and combined all four books in one volume. This was later followed by the "Tooniversal Tour Guide" and "Toon Tales." Now we have the "Toon Ace Catalog." If you're expecting to see all those wonderful gadgets and items that showed up in the Warner Brothers cartoons, you're in for a slight let-down. When I first heard about this book through the Internet, I envisioned a catalog of generic cartoon items (dynamite, cyclone pills, etc). However, what you want or envision isn't always what you get. Each chapter of the book gives information on equipment for each world presented in the "Tooniversal Tour Guide" (Mektoon, CarToon Wars, Toonpunk 2020 1/2, etc), including the standard Toon setting (Anytown). The regular Toon section is just as disappointing as the rest of the book. Although there are the old stand-bys such as anvils and new items such as molecular acid, there are also items which are almost useless, such as roleplaying games (well, I guess you *could* use them to scare off those awful televangelists created by the televangelist pills) and teeter-totters (I cannot remember seeing a toon actually order an ACME teeter-totter--all they ever did was get a plank and balance it on a rock).

Throughout the book there are gray sidebars with funny items such as "25 Things You Can Drop On Somebody's Head," "Top 25 More New Types Of Damage That Could Happen To A Character," or "Top 25 Scenes That Opening A Door (Any Door) Can Reveal" (my favorite is the charging rhino followed by the charging wino). Unfortunately, the damage sidebar turned into a running gag throughout the book—a gag which gets old after two or three pages. The final blow against this book is the section on Anytown. The chapter on Anytown crushes any kind of creativity the Animator might have concerning the Toon city, but then again, one of the cardinal rules of RPGs is, "If you don't like the rules or sourcebook material, change/ignore it." If you can stand to wade through the ultra-corny stuff or find uses for it, then the book is worth the \$20.00.

**PRODUCT:** "Judge Dredd" #1 (August '94)  
**PUBLISHER:** DC Comics  
**WRITER(S):** Andrew Helfer  
**ARTIST:** Mike Avon Oeming  
**PRICE:** \$1.95 (\$2.95 Canadian, £1.25 UK)  
**PAGE COUNT:** 32 pages

Earth, 2045 A.D. America's population is crammed into mile-high "citiblocks." Crime runs rampant and not even the federalized police force is immune to corruption. Enter Judge Dredd, one of many men and women who provide on-the-spot judgment of criminals. However, Dredd isn't your average law enforcement officer. Not only does he enforce the law, he thinks of himself *as* the law. Judge Dredd made his debut in 1977 in the British magazine *2000 A.D.* Later on, Fleetway Editions Limited started a Judge Dredd series and now DC Comics has picked up the torch. DC Comics made one slight change in the setting which might make some long-time Judge Dredd fans uneasy. Instead of starting from where Fleetway left off in the Judge Dredd universe, DC places Dredd in the 21st century--the dawn of the Mega-City and the citiblocks. The world of Judge Dredd has a gritty cyberpunkish feel, complete with the social and judicial satire. A man makes an idle threat toward Dredd and is sentenced to six months of rehabilitation. A police officer is sentenced to 99 years in solitary confinement after Dredd discovers him using surveillance equipment to help another officer cheat (for self-gain) in an anti-gambling sting (at Honest Eddie's Family Gambling Funhouse, of course).

The issue starts off in *media res*. Dredd is in hot pursuit of an unidentified airship and makes his usual unorthodox entry. The Judge quickly throws standard procedure (and himself) out of one of the airship's portholes when the criminals fail to surrender after he cripples their airship, causing a lot of stress for both his superiors and the public. Recognizing the criminals to be members of a gang led by Mickey the Stump, Dredd returns from his wild ride to report what he saw and help take the airship's illegal cargo into custody. Unfortunately, all he receives is a conflicting report on the cargo and a more-than-stern talking to by one of his fellow Judges. Dredd is later stuck with three cadets, who he must

take on supervised street duty. The plot quickly follows up to a climactic encounter at the end of the issue. I won't go on any further so the story isn't spoiled.

Because "Judge Dredd" is set in a dystopian future, violence is a common occurrence. I wasn't really prepared for the violence in "Judge Dredd," but the first issue isn't too bloody. I hope future issues of "Judge Dredd" will keep the violence down to a minimum and concentrate on the story and characters. Oelman's artwork is very well done and reminiscent of the artwork in MGI's Underground RPG. The villains are drawn rather outlandish and somewhat ugly in some cases while the heroes are somewhat imposing and maybe even a little grim looking. As a DC Comics series, I think "Judge Dredd" has a future. Does that mean I'll continue to buy it? My wallet and I haven't finished debating that question.

**PRODUCT:** "Force Works" #1 (July '94)

**PUBLISHER:** Marvel Comics

**WRITER(S):** Dan Abnette and Andy Lanning

**ARTIST:** Tom Tenney

**PRICE:** (Pop-up cover): \$3.95 U.S. (\$5.35 Canadian)

(Regular cover): \$1.50 U.S. (\$2.05 Canadian)

**PAGE COUNT:** Issue #1: 46 pages

What happens when a superhero team breaks up? Do the members just fade away into obscurity? Do they go their separate ways and join other super-teams or form their own? "Force Works" answered some of these questions for me. After the West Coast Avengers disbanded, the few remaining heroes felt lost as to what they were to do. Rising from the ashes of a corporate scandal and the traumatic disbanding of the West Coast Avengers, Tony Stark (a.k.a. Iron Man) calls Wonder Man, U.S. Agent, Spider Woman and the Scarlet Witch together with one purpose in mind: to build a new team. However, not everybody is convinced that Stark's intentions are the best. After a tour of the team's new headquarters (a "smart building" designed and built by Stark Enterprises) and some persuasion from Stark himself, the five agree to join forces as Force Works. Faced with the task of picking up the pieces left by their persecution, Wonder Man and the Scarlet Witch begin to set things straight with their former East Coast teammates (Black Widow and The Vision), only to be interrupted by an attack by a group of Kree terrorists.

Using an unknown superweapon, the Kree manage to disable two of the heroes and the battle turns swiftly to the favor of the aliens. Before the Kree can destroy the heroes, the other three members of Force Works arrive and turn the tide of the battle. However, the worst is yet to come. As one hero attempts to disable the Kree starship in orbit above earth, the others continue to fight the Kree, only to face another interruption--the arrival of an alien traveler named Century. A member of Force Works is killed during the battle, but the Kree are quickly subdued with help from Century. The remaining members of Force Works and the two Avengers quickly begin to assess the damage done but are interrupted by a third alien threat. Century is quick to identify the new threat as a race called the Scatter, but this time the resistance offered by Force Works is futile. Three of the four remaining members are captured and taken back to the Scatter's home universe, leaving a puzzled Iron Man and Century behind on Earth.

The writing and artwork are both spectacular, but I have two gripes about the book. Tenney's artwork has a great amount of depth and detail, but he tries too hard to create the effect of shadows on a character's face. This makes the male characters look a bit more threatening and also a bit older than they really are (a good example of this is in issue #3). My second gripe is that Marvel made the first issue the subject of yet another gimmick cover. This time it was an unusual (and cheesy) pop-up cover. A panel on the cover flips up to show a pop-up scene of the characters surrounded by Kree dog-soldiers. Abnette and Lanning have done a spectacular job in writing the storyline. Not only have they preserved the continuity between "Force Works" and the now defunct "Avengers West Coast," but they

have also tied in past events from "Iron Man". This continuity is further preserved by the fact that the writers have taken no liberties with the post-Avengers emotions and beliefs held by the characters. Even though "Force Works" runs the risk of facing a "crossover" storyline (like any other Marvel book), this is one series I *know* I'm going to continue to read--regardless of any crossovers.

**PRODUCT:** "What If. . ." #64 ("What if Iron Man Sold Out?")

**PUBLISHER:** Marvel Comics

**WRITER(S):** Unknown

**ARTIST:** Unknown

**PRICE:** \$2.00 U.S. (\$2.70 Canadian; £1.25 U.K.)

**PAGE COUNT:** 48 pages

Once again, the writers and artists of "What If. . ." caught my attention with another intriguing story. This month's issue takes a look at the question "What if Iron Man went public?" Like all variations of the Marvel timeline, this alteration produces some major changes. Instead of keeping his technology a secret, Tony Stark reveals his armor secrets, allowing America to make technological leaps and bounds. Unfortunately there is a price to be paid for revealing such secrets. Stark drops out of the public eye, fearing for his life; armor wars rage across the globe; mutants such as the X-Men and Magneto are forced underground by high-tech Sentinels; the Punisher and Captain America are non-existent; crime runs rampant because of armored criminals and an overworked, iron-clad police force.

Like most "What If. . ." stories, the alternate timeline is well thought out and the ending is unusual, but interesting. The artwork rendered for this issue is excellent, but in some panels the characters's faces lack detail. The most surprising part of the artwork is the development of the Iron Man/Stark armor in the altered timeline, ranging from the armor used by the NYPD's Iron Guard to the armor used by the Beetle and the latest version of the Iron Man armor. As a reader of "Iron Man," this issue truly intrigued me as I'm sure it did a lot of other "Iron Man." Even if you're not a fan of "Iron Man" I recommend this tale of a twisted timeline.

## **ANOTHER LETTER JESUS MIGHT WRITE**

**NOTE:** This is strictly an opinion piece. The statements made in this article do not represent the opinions of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), the CAR-PGa (Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games), or the gaming community at large (both on and off the Internet), they are simply my own thoughts on the subject. Readers and contributors to *Interregnum* who wish to discuss this topic (or any other editorial topic) with me, are free to do so through snail- or e-mail as long as they do so in a civil manner. "Flames" and other uncivilized mail will be directed to File 13 (a.k.a. the wastebasket). "Letters Jesus Might Write" is copyright 1955, Vantage Press, Inc.

This summer has been tough for me. As a member of the CAR-PGa I monitor the Internet for threads covering the anti-RPG groups and other bits of information the organization may find interesting. In late May or early June a major discussion concerning RPGs and religion was sparked by several gamers asking the same question: "What's the big deal about RPGs and religion?" Each discussion has lasted for several weeks, spawning various tangents, some of which are still running on rec.games.frp.misc. Never before have I seen gamers generate so much animosity toward Christians. As a Christian, I continually wrestle with my sinful self and the debate concerning RPGs and religion. To tell the truth, I actually considered taking a sabbatical from my duties or even leaving the CAR-PGa altogether in order to escape the continual debate and stress.

I guess it's all part of human nature to fear what we don't understand. Some Christians look at RPGs with confusion and concern, fearing that players are placing their souls in jeopardy because of

vicarious sin. Meanwhile, some players and GMs look at the Christians and see only a bunch of witch hunt-waging theocrats. Last weekend I was browsing in my church's library and I came across a book entitled "Letters Jesus Might Write". The author of "Letters," Dr. Walter E. Schuette, died in August 1955, and publication of the manuscript was negotiated between Schuette's friends and Vantage Press shortly thereafter. (This was a year after Dr. Frederick Wertham began his tirade against comic books.) The book had many letters written to various people--the elderly, university students, merchants, and many others. I took special notice of the letter entitled, "To a Boy," especially the following paragraph:

*"I've watched you reading the 'funnies.' Some people think they are bad for children; other people think they are not so bad; others think they will do you good because they show that it does not pay to commit any crime. If you will keep what the Bible teaches uppermost in your mind while you are reading other things, I know you will come out all right."*

In a way, the same thing can be said about RPGs. Just as Frederick Wertham ranted and raved about comic books being a bad influence, Pat Pulling and a variety of other well meaning but confused people rant and rave about the dangers of our hobby. They tell us that we are sinning and claim RPGs encourage satanism and other pagan activities. Go to a Christian bookstore and you can find material ranging from small pamphlets to full blown books discussing the "sinful nature" of RPGs. I'm quite sure Jesus would have something to say about the entire debate. I am not claiming to speak for God or His Son, but as a Christian, I believe that just as he has a message for the elderly and the young he has a message for those of us in the gaming community who are Christians. This might be what He would say:

*My friend,*

*I am very happy that you have found a way to exercise an important tool the Father gave you-- your imagination. Like many other tools, including the games you play, your imagination can be very powerful and it has the potential for both good and evil. As I write this, many horrible things are happening in the world my Father created. War, oppression, crime, and other evils taint it and devastate the lives of many innocent people. Sometimes these problems can become so great that people try to escape them in a variety of ways. Your hobby is one of those ways. This is not to say that exercising your imagination is bad or that your hobby is evil, but that you should not become dependent upon fantasies to handle your problems. Remember, I am always with you and I always hear your prayers.*

*Some of your brothers and sisters inside (and even outside) the church have probably told you that your hobby is evil and that it will eventually lead you to destruction or that you are not a true Christian because you play roleplaying games. Because of this, I ask you to remember what my disciple Paul wrote in his letter to my church in Rome\*:*

*"Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why*

do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' "

"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin."

*In dealing with those who are opposed to your hobby, do not be quick to ridicule them or use profanities, lies or threats against them. Instead, keep Paul's writings in mind and try to explain your position calmly. Likewise, there are others in your hobby who are opposed to your faith in me. Do not be offended when they ridicule you because you are a Christian or hold the tragedies of the crusades or inquisition against you and your fellow Christians. Instead, turn the other cheek and tell them about me. If you keep my teachings uppermost in your mind and heart when you play or discuss your hobby with others, I know you will come through alright.*

*Your friend,*

*Jesus*

\*--Romans 14:1-22, NIV

## COMMENTARY

*The Log That Flies:* I enjoyed your article on LARP immensely! Do you have any suggestions on what rules I could get (anything but White Wolf, please--I'm not a fan of their gothic-punk stuff). The scenario encounters were great! They'll work very well for Pendragon when (and if) I start running a campaign. By the way, the warp speed ecological threat in that episode of STTNG was confined to only one sector in space, so continuity was not really a problem.

*Session Note:* Mr. Mosdal's question is one that I've thought about from time to time, but I can never really figure out an accurate answer. I agree that RPGs, especially LARP, are closer to theater since you are closer to the characters than you are when you watch T.V. or a movie. Your response to Mr. Mosdal's question was very well written.

*Refugee:* Gee, how does one comment on comments? I was a bit puzzled by your comments on the last issue of *Session Notes*. I think the reason we see so much weirdness and sometimes even stupidity on the Internet is because we lose some of our social inhibitions when we communicate through the 'Net. The reason behind this is that we don't see each other physically when we post or interact on a MUD or MUSH, and so we tend to act and speak with fewer inhibitions in some situations.

*Strange Sands:* Why is it that the AD&D alignment system always comes to mind when someone discusses human nature in a gaming magazine? When I started gaming, I didn't really mind the (A)D&D alignment system, but now that I've looked into several different systems, it does appear a bit restrictive to me. Your review of "Strangers In Prax" almost makes me wish I had started on Runequest instead of D&D. . .

*Who Is John Galt?:* Speaking of POG, did you happen to see the story "Good Morning America" ran on it? I thought the gambling/POG analog was stretching it a bit, but then again, it seems like there's someone who wants to prove that anything and everything is hazardous to one's health.

*Shepherd's Pie:* "Human nature has been focused on, and it is good to say that some game systems actually reward the good side of human nature. Too bad these systems are not as universally well known or played. Seems it's not much fun to role play characters with a sense of human decency." I agree--it seems as though games such as Kult and Vampire: The Masquerade have taken over the market and that it isn't as fun to play virtuous characters any more. I guess it's because it's always easier to do wrong than to do right. The whole issue of whether or not it is a good idea to play evil characters has raged for years. One side says that playing evil characters sets a bad example for the public and only "confirms" the urban legends that gamers are satanic psychos. The opposing side says that playing evil characters is simply a matter of player and GM choice, that it is a good change of pace and that it can even be cathartic if the characters are played properly (I didn't know there was anything "proper" about evil). I guess you could say I side with the both groups--playing evil characters can set a bad example, but the decision lies with the GM and the players. I also agree that Monty Python's version of "The Holy Grail" is a lot more fun to quote. Ni!

*Aye Matey:* Your post-holocaust articles are great! Keep up the good work. By the way, a friend and I are designing a post-holocaust RPG using Steffan O'Sullivan's FUDGE RPG rules. You wouldn't happen to be interested in helping us with the background/societal aspects of the game in your spare time?

*The Eight-Track Mind:* The common characteristics of intelligent aliens you gave were very interesting, but I think they might be more suited to "hard-SF" games like 2300 AD or Traveller rather than space opera such as Star Wars. I agree that those items might not apply to fantasy races, especially since it appears to me that many fantasy games (with the exceptions of Tekumel and Jorune) seem to stick to the "Tolkien-school" of fantasy with orcs, elves, dwarves, halflings (and other demi-humans), regardless of the game's setting.

## COLOPHON

*Tales From The Electric Underground* was created on a Macintosh LC III using ClarisWorks 2.0v1 and a StyleWriter II printer. Special thanks goes to Professor Bruce Ellingson who did the proofreading.

**Editorial Note:** I start my junior year at Buena Vista College on September 1st and will be running *Tales From The Electric Underground* on a bi-monthly basis until the end of the school year.

# THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #6

(I am not a number, I am a free man!)

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

Virgil S. Greene

klyfix@ace.com

But is anybody really free, or is it all illusory? Subject for another time... On to the official topic of:

## HUMOR IN RPGS

"Comedy is not pretty."-Steve Martin

Humor in role-playing. How do we do it? I see a few approaches.

### Comic RPGs

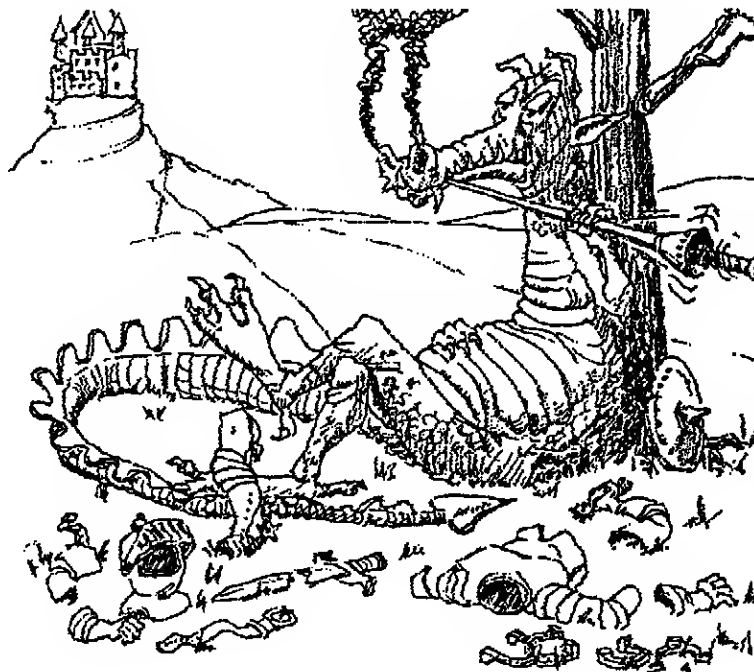
One way of going for the funny bone (or equivalent appendage) is to have a pure comedy campaign. While it is possible to do this with any system I suppose, there's several systems out there geared particularly to comedy.

**Paranoia**, **Tales From the Floating Vagabond**, **Mach o Women With Guns**, and the new **Murphy's World** come to mind and I'm sure there's a few more. These have

absurd settings, or situations, or characters, or all of the above and more.

One problem that's been noted with comic systems is that they may be more fun to read than to play. **Macho Women With Guns** in particular strikes me as being more of a parody rather than a game people really play, though I suppose a few people actually do play it. **Paranoia** is really entertaining to read, and the scenarios are funny, but the one time I played I went through three of my five clones without even getting through the mission briefing. It's easy to just shoot up your fellow player characters as they show signs of being Commie Mutant

Traitors rather than get to whatever the adventure is suppose to be. Not that the adventure is the be all and end all of the game, but if you kill off all the traitors in your party you'll have nobody left. I'd guess it helps if the players remember that killing fellow party members is



destruction of valuable Computer Property and will have to be justified. :)

## Comic Characters

It is possible to have a perfectly straight campaign with one character in the party who is “comic relief”, a basically humorous character. This character has motives perhaps a bit different from the rest of the party and the universe in a vastly different way. They could be an intentionally funny character like some sort of Trickster cultist, jester, or similar character. Or they could be a non-human of some sort whose alieness leads to comic behavior.

There are problems with this approach of course. The comic character is likely to do things that may well endanger the party. I know of one instance where the actions of a secret trickster cultist indirectly led to massive riots in the Gloranthan city of Notchet and would probably lead to the party being lynched if they'd ever returned. In another instance, I was playing a Dragonewt scout that elected to travel with a party of adventurers. After a combat they'd taken some prisoners, and were discussing what to do with them. I got bored and decided to play catch with one of the prisoners, but he couldn't catch very well because his hands were tied. So I untied them. He freed the other prisoners and tried to escape, and in the scuffle that followed some of the party members were hurt. One of the party was angry and elected to really massively fail while first aiding the wounds of the prisoners (that is, he “accidentally” killed them). This angered the Chalana Arroy (passive healing goddess of

Glorantha) priestess that was with the party and she left, leaving us with no healer. Massive disruptions, but entertaining. Unfortunately, what strikes the character and the GM as funny may not be funny to the rest of the party.

## Comic Situations

It's possible to just place the party in a humorous situation. The **Murphy's World** RPG allots for people to come by various means from their regular games to Murphy's World and its craziness. I find the GURPS disadvantage “Weirdness Magnet” in which odd things happen to a character to be useful creating hopefully funny situations. Or they can just run into a Trickster, or a rogue, or whatever. Lots of potential, but perhaps hard to do. There's always the chance that the players will miss the humor.

I recall one instance when my Lunar Rune Lord in an RQ campaign was along with an adventuring party that got invited to a dinner at a minor king's palace. He engaged in polite discussion with one of the king's concubines and she was (he thought) interested in his witty conversation that he wanted to continue with the conversation after dinner. Well, he soon found out that she wanted something other than his mind. I tried my best to politely escape her advances but failed to get away before she partially disrobed and the king and others barged in. He proceeded to make a series of accusations and threats and I tried to explain that nothing had happened, ultimately noting that this was in insult to my honor. Then the king revealed that this was all a joke that he liked to play on his guests.



Well...my Rune Lord was upset and came very close to killing the king or challenging him to a duel. After all, this king was a ruler of some minor Lunar subject kingdom and I was of noble birth and a Lunar Rune Lord; how dare he trifle with me! But I would probably gotten myself and my fellow party members killed if I hadn't decided to "forgive" the insult. Now if this had been a Humakti Rune Lord, he'd have challenged the king to a duel for offending his armor. A Storm Bull would have taken the concubine up on her offer and would have killed the king when he came in, gone berserk, and would proceed to kill off most of the palace guards. The party would probably be running for their lives for quite a while afterwards. Funny in a way....

It sure looks like I'm saying that you just can't do a funny campaign or have humor in a campaign. That's not what I'm saying, but the reality is that comedy is hard and is very subjective. A scenario intended to be humorous might end up looking more like a tragedy. And something that looks funny in print may not be funny in play. I'm not sure how to be humorous in a campaign, but I think some humor just sort of happens. It can be something that just evolves out of the normal game play without being planned and is probably all the better for that.

## **THINGS YOU'LL (PROBABLY) NEVER SEE SOLD!**

### **Magic: The Orgy**

This exciting expansion for Magic: The Gathering adds the joy of sex to the world of Dominia. With such new cards as

Ashnod's Bed of Bondage, Urza's Brothel, and the much loved Clockwork Harlot, The Orgy promises to make for far more "adult" gaming. Adds a wide variety of spells, creatures, lands, and artifacts that mostly cannot be described here. It also includes the rules for the exciting variant, Magic: The Stripping.

### **GURPS Austin**

Adventure in the capital of Texas! The latest and most exciting GURPS supplement gives you everything you need to run your campaign in Austin, including maps showing important sites like the capital building and the home of Steve Jackson Games, the stats of every employee of SJG and everyone in the state government of Texas, and historical notes. It also has notes on using Austin in fantasy, science fiction and cyberpunk campaigns and a special section on using Austin as The Village in GURPS Prisoner.

Coming soon: GURPS San Antonio! With important notes on the Alamo and the place where they make Pace Picante Sauce.

### **Days Of The Ducks**

This latest campaign book for RuneQuest expands upon the revelations in Greg Stafford's book King Of Sartar. Among the most surprising revelations is the fact that heroic Argrath was a duck. Not only that, Harreck the Wolf Pirate, the Feathered Horse Queen, Belnitar the Pharoah, and even the great shaman Sheng Seleris were all ducks. Most of the great heroes of Glorantha were in fact ducks. The reason that the trolls say that Arkat was no

longer a troll after he killed Gbaji was that he became a duck.

The book provides scenarios recreating all the great events of KoS although a few require a minimum of two hundred players. It also adds history and scenarios for times after the events of the book up to the establishment of the Great Duck Empire and the Second Golden Age of Glorantha.

### **C.P.A.: The Accounting**

This latest Storyteller game explores the dark world of the dreaded Accountants. Learn the horrible secret powers of Debit, Credit, and Depreciation. Find out the secret horror of Double Entry Accounting. The book is complete with a history of the Accountants and their relationship with the Vampires and other peoples, starting with Ananias, Caine's bookkeeper in 3600 B.C.. Game in the dark world of the mythic C.P.A.s!

## **ME AND MAGIC:THE GATHERING**

Once upon a time a small company on the west coast of the North American continent created a collectable trading card game. I looked at the ads and the mentions in various magazines and figured that it wasn't worth trying. So I did not buy any **Magic: the Gathering** cards for quite some time.

Then one day Scott Ferrier (of *Aye Matey* fame) purchased several decks and invited several of us to play. It took us a while to figure out the not particularly clear

rules, but in play things became clear quickly. It was truly fun. While Scott had figured on having a few decks that we could all share, it wasn't long before some of us just had to get our own decks.

This is a unique thing that to the best of my knowledge had never been done before in a card or boardgame. Each player has his or her or its own deck of cards designed for whatever style of play we desire. It's a bit like owning a racehorse, or owning a professional sports team...well, not exactly but there is a certain pride of ownership in our cards. My first cards were actually donated by Scott with more from Mark Sabalauskas, but of course I needed to make my own unique decks and to do that I needed to buy some of my own cards.

Weird thing happened however. When Scott bought his first cards he was able to get the normal decks and I believe also booster packs (smaller card packages) of the regular cards. He also was able to purchase booster packs from the *Arabian Nights* supplement. However, when I finally decided to buy cards the only thing available was the *Antiquities* supplement's booster packs. The nice people at Wizards of the Coast decided to redo the regular cards a bit so they were unavailable for quite awhile. I found myself making decks that were heavy on artifacts as the *Antiquities* packs were mainly artifacts. Unfortunately, they were also heavy on things to destroy artifacts. Plus the packs frequently would have multiples of a single annoyingly common card. But it helped make my decks different.

Eventually, the Wizards released their

Revised Edition of M:tG with certain rules clarified and abused cards removed. I was able to buy the regular cards and create vastly improved decks. Then came the *Legends* supplement which lasted in the stores for, oh, a couple minutes, seemingly. Now *The Dark* is out, and WoC is now making a game called *Jyhad* based on White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* RPG, TSR has their *Spellfire* trading card game, Steve Jackson Games will make a trading card version of *Illuminati*, and lots of other trading card games are lurking out there. It is a phenomenon almost on the scale of the early days of role-playing games. And now WoC will be producing a *Magic: The Gathering* RPG.



It's a malignant game. It is being called M:tG, the crack of gaming. It is being accused of keeping people from role-playing. My feeling is that there certainly may be people who are overdoing it, but that's true of anything humans do in the

Universe; anything is abusable. I personally haven't skipped buying RPG stuff to buy *Magic*; there hasn't been that much I really wanted for most of the year. I've played more *Magic* than role-playing, but that's more a function of my schedule and the fact that it takes a lot less to do a game of *Magic* than to do even a one shot, one night RPG session.

There are some weird things about *Magic*, though. Because every person builds their own decks, and because it is a collectable, some card are incredibly valuable. If a card is both rare and useful in game play it can go for \$10, \$15, \$25, and I've heard some have gone for far more. New supplements get bought up at the game stores by essentially speculators who later sell packs or individual cards at substantial profits. Even the game stores are getting into the act; one store in Malden sold *Legends* packs that had a list price of \$2.45 for \$8.50 and has more recently sold *Dark* packs with a list of \$1.45 for over \$2; this when another shipment of the cards will be out later in September. It is a bit like the coins and stamps I used to collect; the collectors bought them because they were interesting but speculators bought them and drove up prices. This seems to happen in any collectable, but *Magic* has the quirk that most of the people buying cards are players; they are more concerned about the usefulness of a card in play than its rarity and will take a common printing of a card over a more limited printing if the cost is less. I should note that I don't have much of a problem with folk buying packs and selling individual cards; that's a convenience when you're looking for a specific card.

So what's good about the game? It's fun, and easy, but each game can vary in many ways; no two game sessions are alike, totally. Opening the packs is a bit like opening up the prize in a bottom of box of Cracker Jacks; a similar thrill. In fact, life is like a Magic booster pack; you never know what you'll get until you open it (I must see Forrest Gump sometime :-)). It is more of a hobby than just a game; in addition to the game play there's the collecting aspect and the social interaction of trading the cards as you tune the perfect deck.

Will this be a long term addition to gaming? Well, I think M:tG is likely to be around; you can be sure that WoC wants it to be as they were not making money until M:tG came along. It won't be quite as much of a phenomena as it has been, and most of the other trading card games will fall by the wayside. The only other trading card game that I'm likely to pick up is the new version of **Illuminati**; most of the other games that are coming out just don't interest me. So there will be maybe a half-dozen trading card games out there, I'd guess in the long run.

## DARK FANTASY ROLE PLAYING

Dark fantasy. Horror, really. But in games like **Vampire: The Masquerade**, **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, and **Nightlife** you are playing what would normally be the monsters. You may not be in fear of the monsters; you may be in fear and loathing because you *are* a monster. What sort of thing is this, and is it a good or bad thing?

The granddaddy of all horror RPGs is **Call Of Cthulhu**. Brought out by Chaosium in 1981, this Lovecraftian game established certain common threads in horror/dark fantasy gaming.

1. There are Things Man Was Not Meant To Know and the World is not what it seems. Naturally, since CoC derives from H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos and the additions that "diverse hands" (to use the Arkham House term) have made to it, a main feature is the notion that the world as we *believe* it to be is not the world as it *is*. Things lurk in hidden places, in obscure New England towns, in dangerous tomes of arcane knowledge that should not exist, yet does.

2. Those who delve into truly arcane lore risk their sanity. CoC invented the notion of "sanity points"; a representation of just how close to insane you are. Your maximum sanity is reduced the more you learn the Truth about the world represented by your Cthulhu mythos score. The "humanity points" of **Vampire** and **Nightlife** are a sort of descendent of sanity points; as one acts more bestial one loses humanity and is ultimately essentially an animal.

3. Sometimes, death is better (to borrow from Pet Sematary). It is said that the goal of CoC is to die sane.

Various other games in the horror genre followed pretty much in CoC's footsteps in the next several years, but CoC was always number one. And for the most part they were games in which the PCs were on the side of Good, or at least humanity, against

NPC Evil, or at least things that were against humanity.

But then along came **Nightlife** and a little later **Vampire: The Masquerade**. In these games the player characters are not humans; they're *monsters*. Creatures usually living off humanity and sometimes killing them. **Nightlife** described itself as "splatterpunk"; related to the blood-drenched work of folk like Clive Barker. Player characters were nearly impossible to permanently kill, and the Magic supplement featured spells that had rather graphic and bloody effects. PCs generally lived (so to speak) in a sort of punk underground and it was not totally illogical for a vampire, a werewolf, and a ghost to be in the same party. If a character indulged his bestial nature too much by using his "kin" abilities more than he reinforced his humanity, he could become a total beast and an NPC. Usually, the abilities and existence of "kin" (their term for the various monsters) is not known to the vast majority of humans.

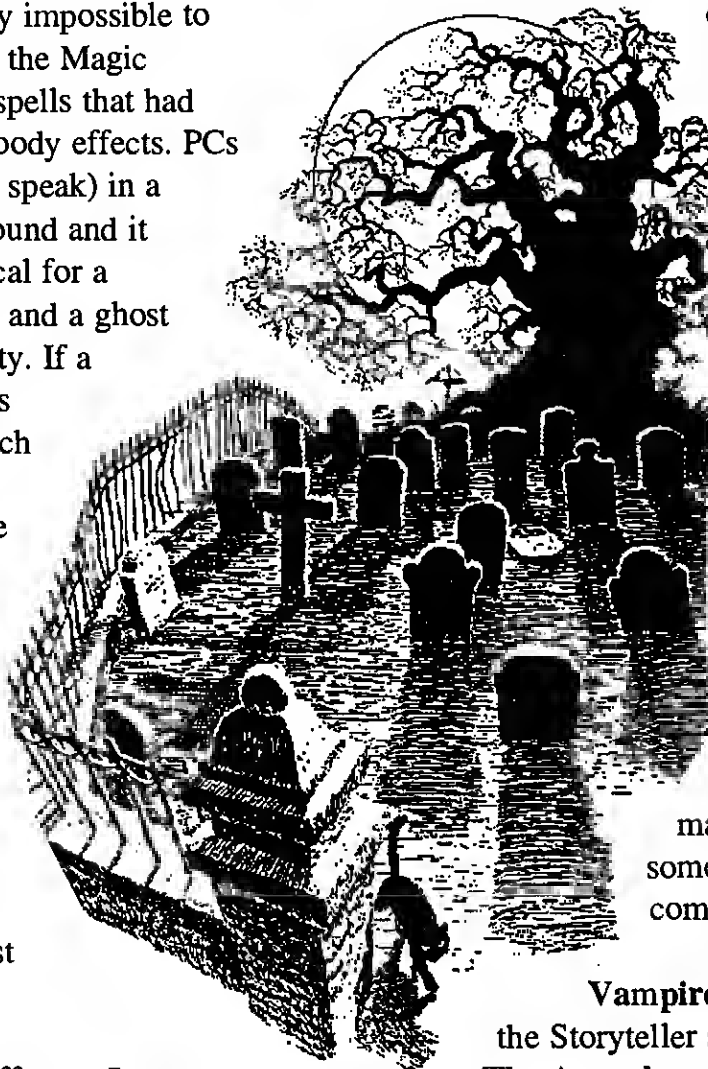
**Vampire** was different. It too invoked "punk" imagery, but it was "Gothic Punk" inspired in part by Anne Rice's vampire novels. Characters were not as invulnerable. And the notion of a mixed

party of vampires and werewolves became implausible as the World of Darkness developed and the basic incompatibilities of the races came out. The game had pretenses. The GM is a "storyteller". The game confronts people with the darker side of human nature within us all. And the rule book had a dedication to Vaclav Havel; playwright, political activist, and president of Czechoslovakia (later pres. of the Czech Republic). It was supposedly a new kind

of role-playing with rules to facilitate that.

A large part of the setting is the competition between the various vampire clans and princes, their behind the scenes control of some aspects of mortal life, and the maintenance of "the Masquerade" as the existence of vampires is hidden from the world. While in theory the game emphasizes heavy role-playing in practice

many games and even some of the modules are combat heavy.



**Vampire** and the other games in the Storyteller series like **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Mage: The Ascension**, **Nightlife**, and other dark fantasy games tended to be more "adult" dealing with matters like sex, explicit violence, vulgar language, and other somewhat

controversial areas that RPGs generally treated lightly if at all. This created a bit of a fuss in some circles with the products not being sold by some retailers. But that was just a beginning.

Now there's other dark fantasy games out that are from the beginning being marketed for "mature" gamers. **Kult** from Metropolis takes the notions that CoC started with and takes it to a new extreme; the whole world is an illusion and the real world is a sort of hell. **Nephilim** from Chaosium (the same folk who brought us CoC) is being marketed as "occult role-playing" and is being marketed with the slogan "Science is Illusion, History is a Lie"; more of the idea that the world is different than what it appears. And Steve Jackson games is bring over **InNomine** from France in which the PCs are angels and devils.

I don't know about the virtues of such things; I prefer to play heroes to playing villains as a player and I'm a bit uncomfortable with getting too "realistic" in a horror game. It's one thing to fight the totally mythical minions of Cthulhu; it is another to deal with evils from my own religious heritage. Heck, I'd be uncomfortable with the use of Tarot cards in a game. Having said all that, the key thing is that these are for "mature" gamers; people who have a good sense of reality and unreality. If you recognize that the spells and demons and monsters are totally fictional then there isn't really any dangers. But I can see that some folk are going to start thinking you're not a real "adult" gamer if you don't play a dark fantasy or dark future games. What's important is what's fun and if one is

uncomfortable with certain aspects of a game they probably shouldn't play it.

## REVIEW

THE WORLD BUILDER Bimonthly magazine Single issue price \$2.95, regular subscription price \$15 Address The World Builder P.O. Box 7196 Bonney Lake, WA 98390-0932

While TWB has apparently been around for a while, I first saw a copy of issue #9 in a game store in Malden Massachusetts in late August. It appears to have only recently achieved national distribution. The magazine proclaims itself to be "THE Campaign and World Building Magazine for Role-Playing Enthusiasts". It has an emphasis on world settings, races, magic items, monsters, and such. They also have an artwork section, and in future issues they will have a feature called "In Times Past" discussing real life in the Middle Ages. One item of particular interest is "The Zine-Find"; a sort of classifieds of various magazines. Most of them are small-press or newsletters, but there's a few company house organs like GDW's Challenge. The magazine has flaws. The cover, for all that the issue number agreed with the inside, referred to articles that aren't inside; it appears to actually be for the next issue. One fairly good article describing a world setting was split into a two-parter not after a paragraph, but in the middle of a word. And there's some other editing problems here and there. The articles almost all seem to be oriented towards D&D or AD&D, but without explicitly saying so. In a reply to one letter the editor notes that TSR sent a

letter to most gaming publications telling them that they could not publish anything on their systems, so I suppose in the future we'll be seeing a lot of this indirect way of doing articles. They do invite submissions for other systems, and in fact have submission guidelines in the back of the magazine. Overall, it is an interesting publication; perhaps a bit amateurish as far as writing goes but remember that the people writing the articles are gamers, not writers. Hmmm, that seems strangely familiar...

## BELATED COMMENTS ON IR #4

As some may have noticed, I neglected comments to Eric Robertson and David Dunham. Slip up in a rush on my part.

\* Eric Robertson, whatever the zine name was as I can't find my copy...

Very, very, strange.....

\* Reading Companion: David Dunham

I recall seeing some stuff on the Discovery Channel (I think) on the Celts; I gather that the general Orlanthi fortification is like a Celtic earthwork as opposed to stonework, except amongst more civilized Orlanthi in Sartar.

## COMMENTS ON IR #5

\* The Log That Flies #5: Peter Maranci

Good overview of LARP. On **The Mask**: Apparently the original Dark Horse

comic is more horrific; the director liked the visuals but wanted more humor. It seems to be a film that people either love or hate. On mechanistic magic: A lot in in how you play it; people should (but don't avoid using terms like "magic points" in play.

\* Session Notes #19: Doug Jorenby

Interesting points on just what sort of thing role-playing is; there's been some Usenet debate on the whole notion of theatrical gaming.

\* Refugee #-42: George Phillies

On Plot: I'm not sure what you mean about a series needing a "plot"; did Star Trek have an overall plot beyond it's opening mission statement? The only shows I can think of off hand that have overall plots are **The Prisoner**, in which the ending is confusing and rushed; and **Babylon 5** in which there is a five year overall plot. In suggesting a Mars Terraforming colony I was suggesting a *setting* in which individual stories would be set.

\* Strange Sands: Gilbert Pili

Interesting stuff on motivation and character development.

\* Who is John Galt? #5: Curtis Taylor

One thing people should know about the RQ digest is that a lot of the folk are "Gloranthan hobbyists" who get into all kinds of arcana about the world beyond what the normal players interest might be.

\* Shepherd's Pie slice #1: Andrew Howes

Ahh, role-playing versus hack and slash; the endless conflict. It takes a bit to make adventures something other than what in our lawful times would be a roving band of robbers.

\* Tales from the Electric Underground Issue #1, Vol.1: Dale Meier

Interesting notes on "slicers" in the *Star Wars* RPG; the description made the game seem more interesting than I'd have expected. On *White Wolf* and excesses: I've covered a bit on that in my piece earlier on "Dark Fantasy" gaming. My impression is that *WW* and other companies are to an extent trying to show that they have "attitude"; "yeah, we're bad". Some companies are more extreme than even *WW*. My feeling is that they are in part trying to create an illusion of rebellion and individual expression; even Nintendo does this in ads for their video games encouraging kids to crank the volume to obnoxious levels. It is more image than substance.

\* Aye, Matey Vol. I Issue V: Scott Ferrier

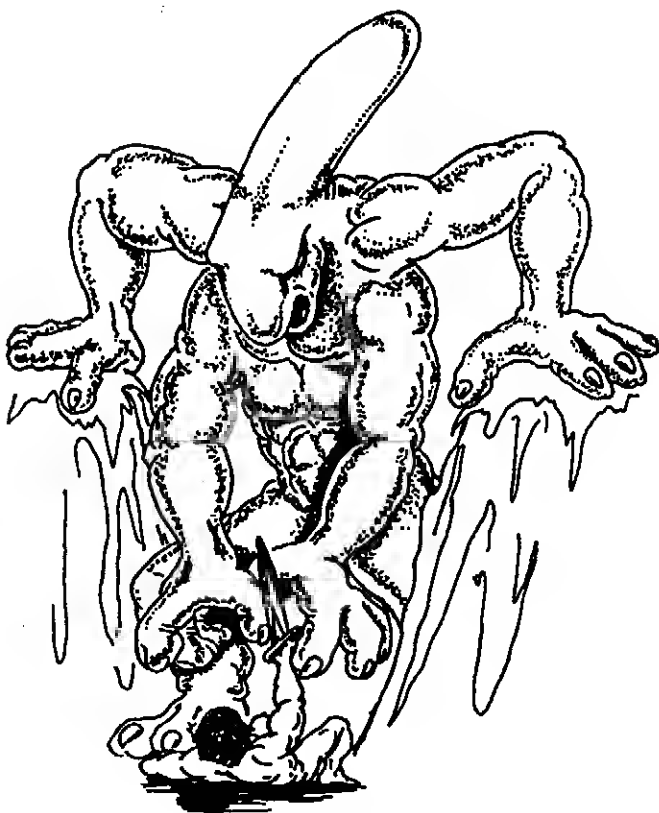
On "Bomb Shelters of the Holy": It would have been interesting to have gotten to those parts... \*sigh\*. Players sure go in contrary directions.

## NEXT TIME:

Well, who knows? But I may try for an examination of just what a "realistic" vampire would be like, for starters.

## OTHER STUFF:

Note that all trademarked and copyrighted names and suchlike are the property of their owners and I wouldn't have it any other way. Also note that some information came from magazines, newspapers, Usenet groups, and the book *Heroic Worlds* by Lawrence Schick.





# firestarter 03

Collie Collier <collie@netcom.com>  
1182 W. Olive Ave.; Sunnyvale, CA 94086  
(408) 738-1359

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"Having you in a game is like playing with sweaty dynamite!" —Guthrum

This zine was inspired by a conversation with one of my roommates, George. Also, a version of this zine has seen print before, as my first and second columns in the Adventurer's Club. It was originally written in mid 1992, so don't be surprised by my characterizations of comics characters being somewhat out of date. This is an unsolicited plug—buy the magazine! Read my column! Comment! :-)

## YOU'RE PLAYING WHAT?!

It seems sometimes there are teams that should be able to run just fine, but don't. The players are good, the PCs are well thought out and interesting, the story has potential, and the GM is enthusiastic. However, for some reason the team is disorganized, the members don't co-operate, and everyone is frustrated. Having been in games like this, George and I sat down and tried analyzing just why these groups didn't jell.

As far as we can tell, there are certain roles that must be filled for the team to work. These roles fulfill both organizational and emotional needs. It should be kept in mind that we are trying to label the roles of the *characters*, not the players. The labels that we have assigned to them may have some bad connotations to some people; however we are simply using these words as labels, not for the emotional baggage they carry. The generalizations may seem somewhat simplistic, but they nicely answer some game problems that George and I have been mulling over.

## ROLE CALL

The necessary character roles (as we identified them) are: the leader, the lieutenant (or second in command), the soldier (or follower), and the rebel.

## THE LEADER

The leader is not necessarily the group's boss, but rather someone who sets the tone for the group. This can be moral, tactical, or some other type of leadership.

A good example of this is Captain America of the Avengers. He sets the moral tone of his team ("We don't kill, and we fight fair"). He is also a combat leader, in that he organizes team strategy, and is always out there in the forefront of battle. Cable, from X-Force, is another excellent example of a leader. He has decided that he is fighting a war—thus killing is condoned. Also, his commands determine both team strategy and individual tactics.

## THE LIEUTENANT

The lieutenant is the person to whom the leader can delegate tasks, trust at her back, and (most importantly) talk to freely. In a sense, the second in command is the conscience of the leader. Her disagreements with the leader will always be privately discussed; she supports the leader completely in public.

Robin, Batman's partner, is a lieutenant. Batman trusts his sidekick implicitly; he knows Robin will carry out directives. Robin will always cover his back on missions, but will speak up privately if Batman's actions seem irrational. Wonder Girl of the New Teen Titans is also a lieutenant. Her leader, Nightwing, counts on her to implement his tactical decisions, and her muscle has often pulled his fat out of the fire. When Changeling, her team's rebel, argues with Nightwing, she actively sides with her leader.

## THE SOLDIER

The soldier (the role most commonly played) is the one who carries out the decisions and moves in the directions indicated by the leader. The private decisions of the soldier can be very important, but they are usually personal rather than group related.

Two examples of the soldier are Colossus of the pre-Dark Phoenix X-Men, and Cyborg of the New Teen Titans. Both have difficult emotional decisions that they have made, but in both cases these were personal. Neither has ever let their team down in a crisis.

## THE REBEL

The rebel is someone who refuses to agree to the direction selected; who resists "group-think". She is similar to the lieutenant, but her disagreements are aired in public. Because she is a public voice, she is not necessarily trusted as implicitly as the lieutenant by the leader. Depending on how her rebellion is expressed the rest of the group may consider her trustworthy, more or less. Leaders usually consider her a pain in the ass. :-)

Wolverine of the pre-Dark Phoenix X-Men and Pantha of the New Titans both exemplify this role. Both are causing the other team members to think about their own feelings on various subjects. Wolverine caused the X-Men to become quite firm in their insistence that no one ever be slain. Pantha is the dissident of her team. She doesn't like her new form, and she questions and argues every decision the team makes.

## THE TEAM

Let us take two examples of teams, and break them down into their roles. The first example is pre-Dark Phoenix X-Men.

Leader: Professor X

Prof. X is the brains behind the team. He is the moral leader of the group, and their spokesperson to the public. He sends the team on missions, thus determining their strategy.

Lieutenant: Cyclops

Cyclops determines the tactics of the group while they are on mission. This insures the leader's directives are carried out. He may have problems with Prof. X's orders, but he won't undermine the Prof.'s authority by arguing in front of the team.

Soldiers: Phoenix, Nightcrawler, Storm, Colossus

These are the team members who carry out their team missions. They all have their own contributions to make to the smooth running of the team.

Rebel: Wolverine

See above.

Now look at a team in flux: the group in Aliens, the second movie.

At the beginning of the mission the power and role structure looked like this.

Leader: The man with the rank of Lieutenant—sorry, I can't remember his name!

Lieutenant: the corporate, Burke; Sgt. Apone.

In this case, the leader's problem was exacerbated by being forced to have two people as second in command. One was Apone, the Marine. He was a true second in command; he was trusted by his leader to carry out official directives. The other was Burke, the official Company representative. The leader had been told he had to listen to this man whenever the Company's interests came up.

Soldiers: Vasquez, Hicks, Dietrich, Crowe, Hudson, Spunkmeyer, Bishop, Wiersbaschie; the Marines.

Rebel: Ripley.

She had an unpopular position (the Marines were in over their heads on this mission), wasn't friendly with anyone, and didn't really want to be part of the team.

At the end of the movie we have a different situation.

Leader: Ripley.

She took control because she had specific experience. The previous leader was not able to cope with the situation, as is shown by him and most of his command dying.

Lieutenant: Hicks.

Ripley had to have Hicks as her Lieutenant for two reasons: Firstly he was the only surviving adult human. Secondly Ripley trusted him; they both had the same stated goal of getting as many people as possible out alive. Thus she knew he would implement her orders: prevent the A(rtificial) P(erson) from retrieving an alien specimen by harming the group.

Soldiers: Bishop, the AP; Newt.

Bishop followed Ripley's orders every time. He had to interpret them creatively; e.g., lifting the shuttle so that the collapsing station would not crush it when her orders were not to move the shuttle. However, his behavior was in all cases oriented towards following orders and saving the group.

Newt had valuable information, but she was a child. Ripley had to give her orders, and hope she didn't break psychologically under the stress. Newt would not have made a good lieutenant; she didn't have the authority of adulthood.

Rebel: Burke.

This unfortunate man had the unenviable task of informing the group that their survival was secondary to keeping the station intact and retrieving an alien specimen. Needless to say, this was an unpopular view. His rebellion took such an extreme form that it caused his death.

## INSPECTION

Say you have a group of good players, an enthusiastic GM, and a team of interesting characters, but your group just doesn't seem to jell. The above framework can help you figure out why. Analyze your team to discover which of these roles are not being filled. Some examples follow.

*The team seems to flounder, and nothing really seems to get accomplished.*

Check and see if you truly have a leader. If the team consists only of soldiers and rebels, the rebels will not be trusted, and the soldiers will have no-one to follow.

Talk to your team-mates and/or the GM about this lack. Decide, or possibly vote, on whom you want as leader. Alternatively, have someone design a new PC specifically for this role.

Another possibility is to have the different characters each take a turn or session playing the leader and making the team's decisions. The best PC to lead will usually show up after a while. If desired, the leader role can stay a temporary thing. However some consistency is good; it is usually best to have some kind of official framework. That way, in a crisis everyone knows who to turn to. If necessary, the "leader" can be just the public spokesperson.

*The leader is unable to come to a decision; the team never succeeds in its missions.*

This is a problem if the team wishes to win sometimes. If your leader is incompetent or waffles constantly, you have the wrong PC for a leader. See above for solutions.

*The team never seems to go into combat. Everything is talked out without a fight. The team's goals are not objects, but rather ideas.*

This is a problem?! ;-)

If you have a very clever leader this is possible. It is a problem when the rest of the team is not included in the process, or if the team wants to fight.

Again, talk to the leader. Let her know what you really want. She may not realize how you feel. Sometimes just being included in the decision-making process is enough. If she's really good, she'll let the team blow off steam in the traditional way. :-)

*Your team has a leader, but the leader is usually cranky or short-tempered. Or the leader constantly gives directions, to the point of distraction.*

This means you may have no-one playing the part of the second-in-command. Your leader is over-worked, and doesn't have someone she trusts to implement her decisions. This will make her frustrated and annoyed at small transgressions. Alternatively, she may be trying to make sure that her instructions are followed correctly by incessantly repeating them.

This case is remediable in the same way as the above example. What you need is a lieutenant. It is slightly more difficult in that your leader must trust the person fulfilling the role of second. The other alternative is to give your leader time off, and have someone else lead for a while.

To be honest, the first suggestion is rather difficult. Playing lieutenant isn't easy. However, the second suggestion is even harder. It is an unusual person who wishes to voluntarily give up control or power. Good luck.

*The team works like clockwork. Missions are always a success.*

See above, re this is a problem?! ;-)

In this team everyone knows and fulfills their roles. The one role that is empty is that of the rebel. This makes for a superbly functioning team. Unfortunately, after some time this can also be rather boring. The challenge is gone.

Try agreeing to have everyone swap roles. This will initially cause chaos, but it is usually fun to try to stretch your role-playing capabilities. Also, it will certainly cause your PCs to grow and change. You know that the team works well together, so if a really bad situation comes up you can go back to your traditional team roles.

*The team spends all its time arguing, and personality conflicts force splits in the group.*

There are several possible interpretations of this. Firstly, you may have two people fighting for leadership of the team. Everyone else is being forced to take sides, as each possible leader vies for control of the largest portion of the group.

Secondly, you may have no soldiers. Many people are trying to fill the spaces meant for only a few. Also, no-one wishes to show "weakness" by taking suggestions from anyone else.

A possible third interpretation is that you have someone with a very strong will who refuses to be leader. They do not want the responsibility of giving orders. Unfortunately, they do not want to take orders either. The only spot left open to them is that of the rebel. Thus they undermine anyone wishing to lead, while providing no steady influence for the group.

I must admit I have never seen a team survive this type of problem. In every case, someone ended up leaving. However, I have seen the rest of the group talk things over and come to amicable agreements.

This situation doesn't have to end all gaming for the group. Identify your troublemakers. Make sure they really are being deliberately difficult—they may be unaware of the problem. Explain the situation. Try to figure out what the points of contention are. Try to solve them, or at least explain them. Perhaps everyone can agree, if the egos are left out of the argument. Remember, you are there to have fun gaming. If it's not fun, why game?

## WRAP-UP

An important thing to keep in mind is that these roles are not set in concrete. Most people are constantly changing and redefining their PC's roles.

- For example, it is possible to have someone who is not usually the leader step forward and set a new directional or moral tone for the group. This could give the team an entirely different disposition. Perhaps the usual leader has no expertise in a certain predicament, causing others with appropriate training to temporarily take on her role.

- If there is no permanent lieutenant, a soldier or even a rebel might have the maturity and/or restraint that would temporarily qualify them for that role. A team where the leader has no second forces her to work twice as hard. Be careful your leader doesn't burn out.

It is not always easy to play the lieutenant. You must support someone whose secret fears you know.

You may feel you could or should replace the current leader. However, be careful with this attitude. It is a good way to undermine the cohesiveness of the group. Also, consider how difficult you would find it to be trusting and confidential towards someone who seemed to wish only ill towards you and your plans.

- A lieutenant losing faith in her leader but not wanting to cause a rift in the team might become a soldier for a while. A rebel gaining faith could do so also.

- Possibly the most annoying role is that of the rebel who will not lead, aid, or follow. This type of person is just obstreperous. If talking to them will not fix the situation, the group may be better off without that particular PC.

- However, rebels should not always be considered a bad thing. A soldier or a second in command might not be able to effectively head the group, but still feel strongly about a situation. They must become rebels in order to effectively discuss the problem. They are rebels because they speak out against the current group-think. These alternative viewpoints can become fascinating explorations of team and personal morality.

## DR. GAMING WESTHEIMER

I know I must sound something like Dr. Ruth, with her incessant, "Communicashun ees thee answer!" Scary though it seems, all you need is the courage to try it. I've found honesty solves most of the problems I've described above. People usually respond well to blatant honesty. Consider carefully those that don't—do you really want to game with them?

Let me how things turn out, and good luck!

## Tales of Ralios

Synopsis: Konall, Minara, Una, Jornast, Harmast, and Aidin were initiated into the Belovaking clan. They crossed to the other side and with the aid of the Flint Slinger Left-Stone Shouter, passed many trials, so many that the priest Halvar Stormeye said that Orlanth had chosen them for a great fate. The thane, Ekel Field-Destroyer, took them on their first cattle raid, into Naskorion.

### *Year 18 of Ekel Field-Destroyer*

Several suitors expressed an interest in Ekel Field-Destroyer's newly-eligible daughters. Nath Brawl, son of the thane of the Karbaring clan of Keanos, offered rich gifts and a female thrall to act as Una's servant. He was surprisingly well-spoken for an Urox worshipper. Una set him to fetch a horse.

Kriofan of the Tronei clan from the Rioximagol Protsam tribe came to court Minara. He had an excellent singing voice, but little wealth. Ekel was concerned that Ashin Slowspeech, king of the R.P. tribe, had threatened to join Naskorion, and Minara turned him down. Minara also received Lorkan, cousin of the thane of the Tomaltachi clan of the Nardain tribe, who worshipped Elmal. She turned him down too.

Jarlath of the Loricati clan came to seek Aidin's hand. Everyone found him likable, and she agreed to marry him. He was ready to carry her off on the spot, but she wanted a delay to organize a wedding.

Radgan the Whistler, thane of the Dianosi clan of the Pranute tribe, sent a messenger promising twice the gifts anyone else offered for Una. Una wasn't thrilled at the prospect of marrying someone her father's age, but decided to at least meet him. With her relatives, she set off for Pranute lands. Ekel went as far as the Murendi tula, since the tribal moot was held there in a few days. He gave his family yearling calves to offer to the Orlanth temple, and gave everyone goods worth one cow to use on the journey. He suggested Tailte, daughter of the thane of the Kachting clan of the Nardain tribe, or Fola Giver, sister of the thane of the Merostling clan of the Esismi tribe, as possible brides for Konall.

Jornast visited his foster-father Amagorri the Smith. Amagorri suggested Aibell of the Red Hair, a young woman in the Gesain clan, as a good match. Harall, a prosperous warrior of the Taskenth clan, took a liking to Minara. She asked him to travel with them to Kilwin.

Aibell had thick red hair and had all the children listening to her stories. Jornast offered to marry her, but her father asked for a year to decide.

As they arrived in Kilwin, they saw some newtlings (tailed humanoid amphibians) mending a net under the bridge. A townsman explained that the newtlings were allies of the city, and had originally helped build it.

They stayed at an inn with the sign of a Black-Footed Badger, though they weren't used to the concept of paying for lodging instead of accepting hospitality.

Kilwin's market had at least some merchants every day of the week. Jornast traded for a rapier, because nobody else in the clan had one. Aidin traded for better armor and high boots with Vinga's motion rune embossed on them. There were many unusual people in Kilwin. Aidin tried to talk to some westerners, but they didn't speak Delelan. Konall and Una had better luck talking to a warrior from Bastis, south of the Mislari Mountains, though they could barely understand him. They were surprised that, although he knew the Orlanthi greeting, he fought with an axe.

As I described in my last issue, I'm running a Gloranthan campaign set in East Ralios.

After running the first adventure, I realized that I had no idea what came next. Except that everyone was now an adult, and were now eligible to get married. In fact, the thane's daughters (Minara and Una) were quite eligible, and his brother (Konall) was a good candidate for a political marriage as well. So I came up with a bunch of suitors and potential brides for everyone.

Keanos is the less-civilized land to the south. Urox is also known as Storm Bull, the berserk chaos fighter.

As one of the players and one of the readers commented, there are a lot of names. One of the points is that there is no real political cohesiveness to the Orlanthi, hence the numerous clans.

I also put all the names in the game log so that the players and I don't have to remember them.

I should have come up with slightly different names for the deities. Nick Brooke suggested Orlando for Orlanth. I might have gone with Orlant.

Jornast failed a Courtesy roll; he can try again the next year as per standard Pendragon rules.



Minara learned Multimissile from a Breath Shaman at the Orlanth temple complex.

They stayed through Windsday to attend an Orlanth worship service. It was much more spectacular than the smaller temple back home; clouds boiled in the sky, and a dozen acolytes chanted in unison.

Harall continued with them. They entered the narrow Doskior Valley, leaving the low hills of the Azitor Basin.

As they crested a hill, they spotted seven riders on the next hill, and guessed they were Galanini. The riders yelled, "Off horse" in broken Delelan. Minara told Jornast to jump on her chariot, and had her driver charge while she ran down the pole to the yoke. She took many arrow wounds, but was knocked unconscious by a spear thrust, and her driver was unable to avoid running over her. Jornast befuddled one of the Galanini, who fled from the charging chariots. Harall had to take the reins when his driver was knocked out by an arrow.

Konall took a spear through the knee which knocked him off his horse, but he used his Fireblood ability to heal himself.

Una traded blows with her opponent, and finally killed him. Jornast took out several foes with javelins, as well as one of the horses. Aidin snapped her opponent's spear, and he made a break for it. Aidin and Una chased after the weaponless Galanini. He tried to evade them by riding into the woods, but Una chopped off his arm when he tried to leap onto her horse, and took his head.

They were able to tend to Minara's wounds so that she regained consciousness and could use her Fireblood ability. One Galanini had surrendered after taking many wounds, and another was unconscious. Konall asked Harall to heal the prisoner, but he insisted on healing an Orlanthi.

Konall could tell that most of the Dianosi lands were a flood plain. They stayed with Hostaran Goldsnatcher of the Dianosi clan, who urged them to take their prisoners to his thane.

Radgan the Whistler welcomed the travelers. It turned out he was named for the way he talked. Una told everyone that making fun of thethane's whistling would shame her and her father. Radgan had two grown sons; his wife had died of a wasting disease probably sent by a Karoni (otter hsunchen) shaman.

Radgan took charge of the Galanini captives. He wasn't pleased that they'd fought them. The Dianosi clan gave the Galanini gifts rather than offend them by riding horses. Una was secretly relieved that her father wouldn't approve of Radgan and his policy of appeasing the Galanini. Konall decided to give two of the horses to Radgan, since the attack had occurred in Dianosi lands.

Radgan's sister-in-law Ekfol, assuming that she'd soon be part of the Dianosi clan, took charge of Una, showing her local sacred spots such as the Red Woman grove.

Una skillfully tended the wounded until they were well enough to travel.

In Talvingi lands, they were given hospitality by Denall, a simple farmer. His stead didn't have room for everybody, so some people slept in the cow shed. In the middle of the night, Harmast heard something outside. It turned out to be a horde of trollkin. They beat off the ones trying to enter the shed. Una climbed the roof after one who'd gotten up there. Then they saw another group trying to get into the stead, and raced over.

The fighting was fierce. Jornast used Fireblood to heal himself, which scared away one of the trollkin.

Finally there was only one trollkin left standing, who ran away.

Multimissile is a spell not normally available in the Orlanth pantheon; however, there are Kolating, or Breath Shamans, who are more or less associated with the Orlanth religion. I'm allowing each player to learn one spell through a shaman.

The Galanini are horse hsunchen—nomadic hunter-gatherers who worship a horse totem, and have spells that can turn them into horses. They consider horses to be brethren, and forbid anyone else to ride. Chariots are a loophole in the Law of Galanin—technically, they're not prohibited.



Ekel Field-Destroyer is fond of horses, and worships Elmal Horse-Thane. He cares nothing for the Galanini prohibition on riding.

There are many local spirits, each with a sacred spot. Red Woman's magic is available only to women.

Wounds that take weeks to heal are one of the ways Pendragon is a realistic system despite being abstract.

Trollkin are stunted trolls, the result of a curse. They're nocturnal, and unlike normal trolls, demoralized in daylight.

Fireblood heals Honor in HP in an impressive burst of flame and steam.

Harmast ran after it, and was catching up, when suddenly it turned around and ran its spear through him. The trollkin chewed off Harmast's ear, then fled.

They ended up with 15 trollkin heads, which they put up around Denall's farm to scare off more trollkin, and gave to the neighboring farmers who came by.

They continued on to Merostling lands, and were guests of the thane, Feredach Ghostbane, who owned an unusual sword with which he'd destroyed a fearsome ghost. Konall took his sister Fola Giver for a ride on his horse, and was impressed by the poem she composed about the trollkin. Her kinsmen had little good to say about Fola, but Una was able to learn from the servants that she was proud, strong, and well-fitted to manage a house. She was very generous, always making sure strangers were well fed. Her brother felt threatened by her competence.

They traveled on to the Kachting clan, where they were guests of the thane, Engaran the Loud. Konall talked to his daughter Tailte, who had the Healing Gift, but wasn't sure if she wanted to devote herself to Chalana Arroy.

They returned home. Ekel turned down Harall's request to marry Minara.

Although she'd really wanted a larger horse, Una was touched when Nath Brawl brought her not only a Galanini pony, but its rider's head. She agreed to marry him.

About a week later, Kuan of the Melvori clan of the Atnakol tribe rode up in his chariot and asked to marry Una. When she told him he was too late, he swore an oath that she would be his bride some day, and drove off.

Konall decided to marry Fola, so he and Ekel Field-Destroyer returned to Feredach Ghostbane to negotiate the bride-price. Konall had composed a song for Fola.

Una and Nath Brawl were married in a big ceremony at the Belovaking tula. Konall gave them an elaborately carved hearth stone

Konall and Fola Giver were married in another big ceremony at the Belovaking tula. Una gave them a well-made table and chairs. Konall's foster family attended.

Una and Nath returned to his father's stead in Keanos.

We decided that the effect of the Major Wound was to reduce his APP by 1.

Major Wounds are another way Pendragon is realistic despite being abstract—wounds can have a permanent effect!

Chalana Arroy is the Orlanthi goddess of healing; her Healers must swear an oath of total non-violence.

Harall is a nobody—Minara is the thane's daughter, and can do better.

Unfortunately, it was getting late; it would have been nice to have run the weddings in a little more detail.

## Comments on #2

*Douglas Jorenby* Out here our *RuneQuest* GMs run published scenarios but never exactly as written. Which is a good thing, since I've read most of them before publication. I agree that it's impossible to put a great GM in a book, but it is possible for a good GM to get ideas or save time. My own biggest disappointment with published scenarios is the difficulty fitting them into a campaign. For example, the *River of Cradles* supplement requires a worshipper of Zola Fel, but *Gods of Glorantha* says that this cult is inappropriate for PCs. In *Sun County*, an excellent scenario requires a member of the Orlanth pantheon—nobody in our group qualified.

*Mark Sabalauskas* I like the way you presented Fronela. Are you going to explain the fauna? The low magic spells were nice.

## Comments on #4

*Peter Maranci* re technology failure: I always thought one of the best parts of my *Interface* cyberpunk game was that you rolled each year (on your birthday, for convenience) to see if your cyberenhancements failed. The older they were, the greater the chance. A great rule in theory, but in practice I ran a lot of sessions and only about 2 weeks of game time went by, so the rule was meaningless.

Actually, in RQ the big use of technology is iron vs bronze—iron is modeled as being stronger than bronze.

In *Pendragon*, the sword is the ultimate in technology, in that swords may break other weapons (on tied rolls). *Pendragon*'s chronology also introduces new pieces of technology (such as crossbows, destriers, and Gothic plate) during the campaign.



# The Skeleton Key

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dhobemma@emerald.tufts.edu

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## TEXTURES: Shades of Light and Darkness

The recent rash of dark and gothic roleplaying games seems to be a reaction to the earlier glut of high fantasy - "happy birds and singing elves" that seemed to pervade the gaming medium. Now the pendulum is swinging the other way, to the "in your face" dirty gritty worlds where there are no heroes, only those who survive and those who fall. What sort of simplifying paradigms are we running into here? Often there seem to be two polar ones with some gray in between:

**Light:** things are fantastic, heroic, larger than life, clearer moral boundaries exist. Ex. AD&D, often superheroes games,

**Grey:** things are horrible, gritty, there are no true moral authorities. Cyberpunk, the "World of Darkness" games from White Wolf, many others.

All too often it seems that games that have humorous or heroic elements lack drama or gritty moments, while the sun never shines on the Dark and the clouds are always there. Humor is seen as almost inappropriate in "dark" worlds, that almost take themselves too seriously. Gritty political intrigue and



backstabbing doesn't seem to be encouraged in heroic style games. Why is it that these two gaming paradigms are so hostile to each other? Is there any room for compromise? Why does everything have to be strictly gritty or heroic? Is there no between ground? Perhaps in clinging too steadfastly to gaming archetypes we're robbing ourselves of some fascinating chances to engage in something more reflective of human nature, textured with both gritty and heroic elements, humor co-existing alongside bleak despair.

A recent session of our Avalon game (mutant anthropomorphic animals in post-holocaust Britain) was an example of a game that mixed humor and grimness with

equal aplomb.

### Our Cast:

*Colonel Mustard*, a falcon colonel of the West Country army (the player wasn't original with names.)

*Puff*: A psychotic Cute badger (with capital C) mercenary from West Country.

*Morgan*: My lynx druid in hiding from Wales: other PCs think he is a trader.

*Thursod*: A cheetah sniper from Scotland, former revolutionary in Cornwall.

### Our Guest:

*Nockwurst*: hedgehog soldier from Cornwall.

We were investigating the disappearance of a West Country envoy by orders of the King. (Crown merc/scouts depending on your frame of reference...) Following rumors that a revolutionary band in Cornwall that Thursod had once been associated with might be responsible, we sought out their camp.

Soon we were all brought in to the band's camp and invited in for dinner with their leader. More like invited with the understand-



ing that if we refused we'd probably be killed.

So we sat there dining with a revolutionary who had the power to launch a destructive guerilla invasion of the West Country.

Through the dinner, we were trying to get information out of carl and Nockwurst - in the friendliest way possible. Indirect comments, and leading questions were our weapons, blunting the suspicions of our captor-hosts. Our association with Thursod made it possible that we could be hired to do some spying for them.

As the evening went on it became clear the situation was even grimmer. Nockwurst told us, "So can we trust you? Do you want to be on the winning side — or the losing one?" He made it very clear without actually saying what happened to the losing side.

The Colonel pretended to get drunk to try to dig more info about them — and he was so annoyingly good at it that we called for a serving wench to drag him away.

So as the evening progressed and our characters got a bit more soused, we gamed accordingly, and at one point, Morgan and Nockwurst were singing (yes \*we\* were actually singing - much to the bewildered astonishment of the other players, including the GM) a lopsided duet of "My Bonnie lies over the ocean" and having a wonderful time, making horrible puns about the Colonel.

"oh, a bit of a bird brain."  
"too flighty."  
"mind as light as a feather."

And worse.

Yet here we were, both players and PCs, aware we were dining with those who would kill us without a second thought if they knew who we really were — and might kill us anyway if we didn't do what they wanted.

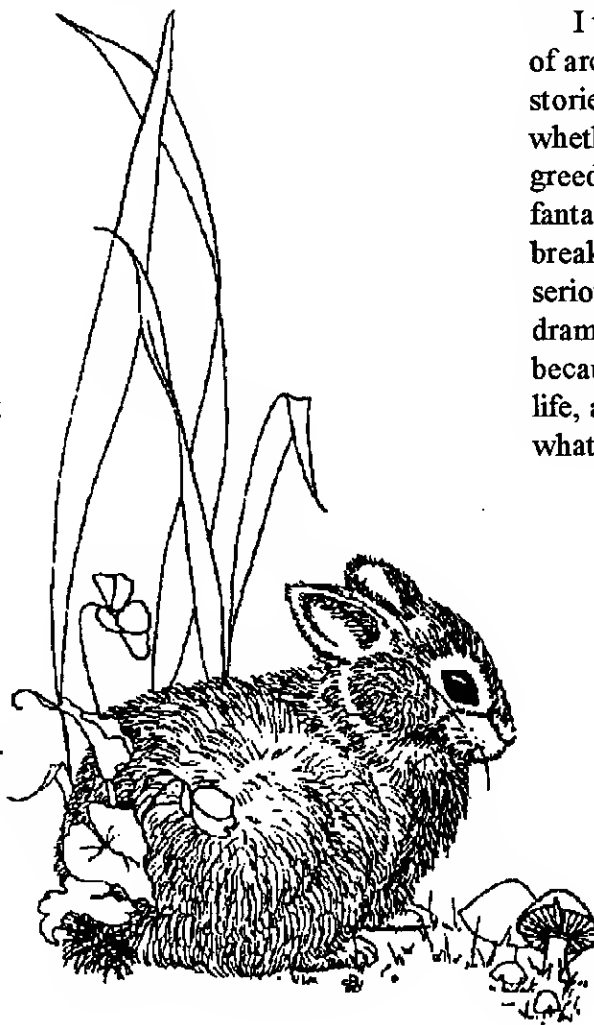
Once we retired for the night, along with our "escort" Nockwurst, we began to plan, hoping desperately that we were

not overheard.

This is what I'm getting at - texture. Things were going on two very different levels - the happy go lucky drinking party — and a war of minds trying to tease out information that could decide the fate of nations.

Too often games have a unidimensional touch to them - either too light or too dark, with little variation. Furry animals do not seem to lend themselves to "deep" role-playing — but we had some real dilemmas, and the dark and cynical coexisted with the happy go lucky antics on the surface.

I think that people have a love of archetypes, and like to see stories played out in certain ways, whether they are dark stories of greed and betrayal or heroic fantasies. It takes an effort to break that mold and have the serious mixed with the comic, the drama with the fluff. Perhaps because that's a lot closer to real life, and sometimes that's just what people are looking to avoid.



# WHO AM I, WHERE AM I AND WHAT AM I DOING DRESSED IN HOSPITAL GREEN?

by Elizabeth McCoy  
(emccoy@world.std.com),

Just to introduce myself, I'm the player of Kendra Murphy, amnesiac stowaway lab project, in David "Dobie" Hoberman's PBEM. The one who "constantly recalls bits and pieces of her life in her dreams, never knowing what is true and what is not." [IR#4, Skeleton Key#10, p.4, re 8-Track#3] Did I mention she's a little neurotic? Of course, I'm the one playing her... Best not to follow that train of thought. To cast further doubts upon my sanity, she's my *\*second\** amnesiac character. But playing amnesiacs is *\*fun\**. Let me proselytize...

(Bear with me on this one, please — I've written countless English papers dissecting various books, and I've written the occasional gaming war-story, and I don't know how well I can blend the two...)

>D is the above commentary to me or in the article?

>D if not to me than I don't think we need to worry about it.

ME [Not to thee, just in article. Introductions.]

It all started when my local gaming group was creating a batch of new characters for a "Scruffy Traders" space campaign — money-problems, mainstream

tech, and one mildly dilapidated ship seemed a useful change from our other PCs in that universe.

I wasn't getting any inspired ideas for a character background until I discovered the amusing little GURPS disadvantage of Amnesia... I've often found that when it comes to creating a character, for the most part, the advantages, stats, and skills are what me character can *\*do\**,



while disadvantages are what my character *\*is\**. Only after a few games does it become clear how the PC's advantages affect her personality — the disadvantages and quirks are much more obvious.

The idea of playing someone coping with that level of confusion was interesting. And besides, I wouldn't have to think of anything spectacular for a background. *\*grin\**

I selected the basic stats, appearance, and a few advantages suitable for a pilot (we needed one), then went through and selected skills that I thought would be interesting and eclectic — stuff like Crossbow, Lockpicking, Diplomacy, etc. After all, *\*I\** didn't need to come up with an explanation for why the character had these skills! My spouse/GM did a final pass, adding disadvantages, other skills, and removing some of the ones I'd picked. Then he "grayed out" most of the computer-generated character sheet and handed it to me.

"You wake up. Two people are walking out of the room. One asks why the restraints weren't put back on 'her.' The other replies, 'Don't worry, Doctor, she's not dangerous anymore. We'll finish the procedure tomorrow.' The door closes, and you hear a voice in your head: 'You've got to get out of here. Your clothes and equipment are two doors to the left.' You're wearing a hospital gown."

Through numerous sessions, solo and with other PCs, S.H.

(aka Simone Hospitaliar aka Silver Hawke aka a cast of thousands — she had several different ID cards among her possession) discovered that she was a vigilante in the sype of Simon “The Saint” Templar, had a “gene-hash” trick that allowed her to impersonate any human, and had been looking into suspicions of mind-control technology on the station where she was brainwiped. Eventually, with the help of the other group of PCs (all members of a small corporation called Artemis Enterprises), she got her hands on the creep who brainwiped her, and recovered her predecessor’s braintapes. Now all she has to deal with is her predecessor: “Mom”... This was not an easy road, of course — with the aid of the “voice in her head,” she escaped the station where she woke up (via stealing a Warp 7 {that’s fast} Executive Shuttle), and out of pure luck got onto a passing freighter at the primitive planet she’d landed at when her engines gave out. Her first meeting with the president of Artemis Enterprises occurred when Silver flubbed a high-level password on her newly-bought Artemis computer, and the computer sent a “I’ve been stolen!” message. I, personally, had never met this particular NPC president as an outsider, and was honestly worried that Silver’s career would be snipped short! Fortunately for my nerves, the NPC was merciful and even helpful (NPC: “Shannon Hood... She’s an assassin.” Silver,

in a small voice: “Oh. I was wondering when that would show up on the resume.”). Other minor problems included running into a private investigator who thought she (Silver) was one of her other personas, Sherinford, working undercover; looking up her fence, the cat-centaur Flare, and discovering that he knew her secret — and they’d been sleeping together for the past seven years; paranoia about when a brainwashed clone of hers might come looking for her; and coping with panic attacks when the president of Artemis apparently fell in love with the aforementioned creep who’d brainwiped Silver in the first place.

In Dobie’s PBEM, I had a similar problem — lack of inspiration in character conception, exacerbated by little knowledge of the universe-background and a *\*distinct\** lack of familiarity with his home-brew game-mechanics. After batting a few character ideas around, I suggested a psi amnesiac. (This meant that Dobie would have to design the character for me, among other things, so I didn’t have to worry about *\*how\** the mechanics worked! Heh heh heh.) He added epilepsy. [Dobie: “and who knows what else. *\*grin\**” Me: “Augh!”] I got “Kendra Murphy,” a brainwiped healer, heavily modified for greater strength and gravity endurance so that she could function in the higher-G worlds of the Axis. Oh, yes, and she has her flashbacks, subconscious input from her artificially implanted personas (Hegemony secret agent

and Ganthan assassin/spy), and is probably being pursued by not only the Hegemony Security Agency — think CIA, KGB, and NSA all rolled into one — but the presumed Spinward Alliance group who extracted her from wherever-it-was, and maybe any other two-bit megalomaniacs who find out about her and think she could be re-brainwashed to their purposes. It’s not paranoia when they really *\*are\** out to get you.

Amnesia is a disadvantage that is guaranteed to get your character into trouble. (Kendra, in particular, has more plot hooks in her than a closetful of breeding coat-hangers.) Few GMs are likely to say, “Well, you bumped your head and don’t remember you were Joe Average, the store clerk” — unless they can arrange things so that Joe Average *\*thinks\** he was somebody else significantly more spectacular. You will often wind up with disadvantages that you would never have picked on your own — S.H. was addicted to a dex-boosting drug, and was scared of reptiles, when there were three reptilian races in the campaign! And I’d passed over epilepsy *\*countless\** times in GURPS games; furthermore, Kendra may be a healer, but she gets *\*awful\** headaches from it, and being healed is apparently agonizing (this is not something I expected!). To make me even more troubled, she apparently needs some special drug, and I don’t know what’s going to happen to her if it can’t be synthesized

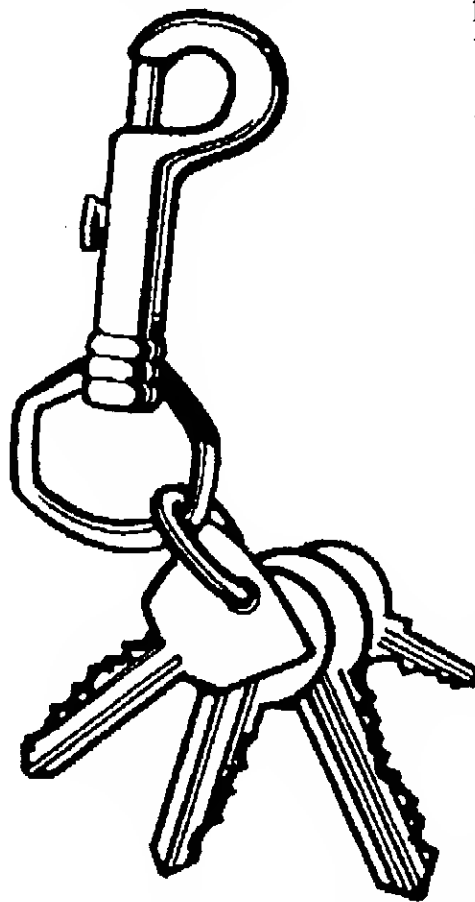
properly. If you like dealing with secret enemies, unknown skill sets, exploring “new” disadvantages, and a lot of confusion, amnesia is pretty fun.

Roleplaying an Amnesiac can be a challenge. At best, you’ve suggested what kind of a character you’d be interested in playing, and you have to trust that the GM will come up with something you can live with. In Silver’s case, that was fairly easy — my GM is my spouse, and he has a decent idea of my personality. In Kendra’s case, I think I just plain lucked out; I had figured that if it didn’t work out, well, it was only a PBEM (Little did I know how this PBEM would turn into a

near-obsession...) A lot of the fun, for me, is discovering, deciding, and deducing out what kind of a person the PC was before the amnesia, and trying to play that. With the right GM and player, there’s a definite synthesis, where the “NPC” (pre-amnesia) version of the character provides a catalyzing influence on the player and inspires him or her to push roleplaying boundaries. Silver, rather logically when some of her alternate personas were considered, turned out to be omnisexual — if it didn’t have scales, it was a potential partner — and kicked me out of the “Pure Het” side of the scale. Kendra has a memory of taking an oath to the HSA, and I’ve discovered that the fact she *\*can’t\** keep it (I’m sorry, but inciting civil war and perhaps genocide just doesn’t look good on the resume) bothers me/her.

There’s another, less high-

falutin’, plus-side to Amnesia, directly related to all the trouble the GM is going to dump on the PC. The PC is, to a very large extent, partly the *\*GM’s\** PC — the GM decides the character’s past and previous reactions to things. Because of this, the GM will give you goodies, consciously, subconsciously, and inadvertently. When S.H. was created, she had extra points in



disads, and I got that gene-hash trick; her predecessor had a *\*lot\** of expensive toys stashed here and there, and Silver picked up some of them. When I got Kendra, I suggested a list of base statistics — I think I can safely assume that some of her stats are much higher than I suggested,

though there’s an implication it will take special drugs to keep them that way... You’ll probably be paying for the PC’s bennies in paranoia, but they’ll be there, and you won’t have to fast-talk the GM to get ‘em, either. Still, despite the pluses of *\*not\** having to design the character yourself (and trusting that the GM won’t design a useless character), being a center of attention (GMs will put plot hooks into your character), and the potential benefits (the GM realizes that the PC would have to have been pretty good to survive long enough to get amnesia), you need to be careful about creating an amnesiac. Amnesiacs are especially vulnerable to the “Story-teller”/ “Railroad” type of GM who regards all characters as plot devices anyway — the PC is likely to have no consistent personality or skill levels, and if the plot requires something to be done, the GM will probably take over the amnesiac’s actions. Reading a story wherein the protagonist gets actions dictated by some controlling deity or Power can be bad enough. Getting pushed to full “spectator” status would be a pain. Having tons and tons of secret enemies, unknown bastard children, vengeful ex-lovers, and IRS auditors showing up on your doorstep would be equally irksome, *\*especially\** if the GM *\*doesn’t\** give you some bennies to help deal with this.

I’ve been lucky, two out of two times, but I’ve also taken

care, when with a GM that I didn't trust, to create PCs who knew their pasts — the idea of giving those GMs that much control over my character never came to mind, partly because I don't want *\*all\** my characters to have amnesia, and partly because I had enough qualms about their gaming style already. Now, from a GMing standpoint, I can only extrapolate what the pros and cons are for amnesiac PCs. I imagine that the opportunity to put plot hooks on a character is good — at the start of the game, the amnesiac will probably have the best-developed background. Perhaps there's a little vicarious "playing" as the PC discovers his or her previous life. There's undoubtedly a certain interest in seeing what a player will *\*do\** with the information found. And if you absolutely *\*have\** to Schroedinger the group out of a mess, there's the PC with the potential for strange abilities or unknown friends — and in true "out of the frying pan into the fire" GMing sadism, the rescue can be nearly as hazardous: "What do you *\*mean\** you don't remember when we fought at Barr's Ford?"

There could probably be draw-backs. A player may be even lazier than I, and want the GM to do *\*all\** the work with the character, so the amnesiac becomes boring and would be more interesting as a full NPC; a waste of time, thought, and effort. A GM

would have to resist the temptation to make the amnesiac *\*the\** main character (Dobie does this quite well, BTW), and be sure that the amnesiac wasn't embroiled in difficulties that the *\*player\** can't cope with. (Fortunately, the effects of brainwipe are bound to be nasty, so it's not *\*that\** unreasonable for the pre-amnesia NPC version to have been trickier than the PC version. Still, use discretion.) And, finally, the player has to think the character is interesting and isn't still "being run" by the GM — whether or not the GM is usually a "Railroad GM," there's probably more hazard to being *\*seen\** as one if the player's vision of the character is too far out of sync with the GM's vision.

However, for the masochistic player who wants to try something different, having a PC with amnesia can catalyze some very interesting gaming.

.....

Thora turns back to the hypnotized Kendra. "Kendra. Remember when you were in the car? Describe what led up to then, please. Stop." Thora takes Kendra's hand again.

Kendra's eyes unfocus, and her heartbeat increases. "I was in a white bed, in a room all by myself...I could see the top of the guard's head if I looked hard enough...I remember..." She grimaces with the effort. "A man in an HSA uniform, with black hair who came for me. He told me that I was going to be *\*de-*stroyed\*..." She shivers and

squeezes Thora's hand. "So I went with him. We just walked out. If anyone questioned us, he just waved a card at them, and they stopped asking questions." She shivers. Softly, she murmurs, "I tried...I tried so hard for them...It wasn't my fault!"

Thora says in quiet horror, "Kendra, *\*why'd\** you go with him if they were going to *\*de-*stroy\* you? ...uh, stop!"

She blinks as if the answer is obvious. "Because he told me to." Thora rolls her eyes, but says only, "Kendra continue stop." Kendra starts to shake uncontrollably, and her voice is low and dead, as if this is the only way she can continue speaking. "Then we went into a large white room, and there were three others there. One was a woman... a nurse. The man told me that they were there to rescue me. Then he touched my arm and everything went blank. I woke up in the car. Alone."



# COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #5

## the Log #5

*"...the questions of human nature are not often dealt with in role-playing games (at least in my experience). This seems a pity since that subject is perhaps the most fruitful source of mature and meaningful art...most [published scenarios] are action-adventure oriented."*

Questions of human nature are tricky things and nowhere as easily constructed as the typical action-adventure scenario. First one needs to have the group for it. If most of the group is more interested in fast-paced action adventure or problem-solving, then that must take center stage. Some players like to explore the relationships between their characters and others, arguing, joking and soaking in the background of the campaign world. Others are more eager to forge forward, and constantly be moving. Often in games that I have run, we've maintained a precarious balance, cutting between scenes of heavy role-playing and fast paced action. Each in their place contributes something to forming a game that people will remember.

Second, such constructions are intimate and not easily translatable to the outside world. Each character can bring their own ideas and questions to the table, often woven into their background; My dwarven paladin of several years ago, tormented by the loss of his wife, who ended up having a moonlight meeting with her shade, the grubby Indian road warrior Steel Eagle, who realized he had fallen in love with the clone of a biotech company division that had put a price on their heads, all are small stories in themselves, whose particulars may no longer matter but the essence remains.

## session notes #19

*"Role-playing...is a form of story telling that draws upon modes that came before it, but offers a unique and compelling synthesis of its own."*

Your essay on the various media and their fusion towards role-playing made me ponder two more ideas on synthesis. While the GM typically defines the parameters of the campaign world and orchestrates the actions of everyone outside of the immediate circle of player characters, it is not uncommon for the players to contribute background material whether as simple stories of their character's past, or going so far as to design whole worlds and civilizations.

Within the constraints of the campaign, the characters are free to take whatever actions they please, and it is this free form of action that is one of the essential parts of real role-playing. The fusion of the efforts of all the players and gamemaster produces the on-going campaign and evolving storyline, whatever it may be. Unlike any commercial medium, a game is always full of seams where the constructed nature shows through. Minor quibbles about rules or applications, questions about background, even breaks for snacks interrupt the flow of the game. This is not necessarily a negative feature of gaming - but something that ensures that we won't be seeing RPG-TV anytime soon. Gaming is an activity ill suited for outside observation. Most the action is going on within the minds of the players and GM, and it is indeed a synthesis that is all its own.

## REFUGEE

Thank for the references. When I said "there is no cultural evolution" I am stating that there is no quasi-linear progression for culture as 19th century social science and modern popular culture assert. Sorokin's work would fall outside that benighted sphere, with his idea of "chaotic evolution" which sounds quite interesting.

## STRANGE SANDS

I agree with you that the much derided alignment system of AD&D, whatever its other faults, at least forced people to consider patterns of behavior, or loose codes by which their characters would live by. Of course, this brought about the all too familiar "insane chaotic neutrals" who would do whatever they wanted however they wanted without much concern for anything else. I never had much respect for players running such characters - it became numbingly predictable how the character in question would act - often without much consideration that they were supposed to be playing characters and not loose cannons.

The key to playing with alien cultures is finding out the level of interest of your players. There is a lot of material in my PBEM that was developed solely because a player asked about it, or other times, created a seed idea that was developed jointly between us. Involving your players in the campaign is not only a lot of fun for those so inclined, it often brings out ideas you might never have thought of on your own.

# TALES #1

Another senior working on a major thesis project! I happen to be an anthropology major myself, so I can sympathize. I enjoyed the Star Wars write-up: though I've only played once in a short campaign. Your adventure ideas look like they have the seeds for some exciting gaming. If you have problems finding players, why not start a PBEM? :-) (The past few IR's have had bits from my science fiction PBEM floating around in it.)

## Is White Wolf Going Too Far?

White Wolf's advertising is directed at a small market segment: gamers. To catch their attention, they have apparently resorted to the sort of ads you cite. I agree that they are in poor taste, with all the rumor and misinformation about the nature of RPG's floating around, but that does not bear directly on the quality of the games themselves.

I am not qualified to attack or defend White Wolf products because beyond the initial perusals which convinced me not to buy the games (the amusingly dumb cartoon in Wolf, the interesting anti-rational paradigm in Mage, and the lack of desire to play something that drinks blood) I haven't read them. Apparently neither have you:

*"From what I've heard, White Wolf's materials go to extremes on subjects such as the occult, homosexuality and violence."*

Aside from the fact that I find it odd you include sexual orientation in between occultism and violence, it is inexcusable for you to criticize something without first reading it. This is not to say that I doubt WW products touch on the occult and have violent overtones, but that your argument is rendered ineffective by the admission

that you have not even bothered to read the books you are condemning.

To address other issues raised in your piece: considering that the main market of RPGs continues to be teenage males, I do think that focusing on the issue of parental impression is a good one. However, there are many gaming books that one's parents might get the wrong idea about. The solution, of course, is to explain exactly what it is that gaming is. Most of the time, I have



found this to work rather well. I've had discussions with my mother about the level of violence in games, and years ago, started a gaming club in my Catholic high school by inviting the brother who was the vice principal to check up on us whenever he wanted. Every now and then, we'd catch him gliding silently down the halls, peering in on us as he whisked by. If rational discourse does not convince them, then there is not much else to be done. Unfortunately some people are too firmly set in their idea of what gaming is to be able to change.

The occult, or the fantastic, is a part of many role-playing games, and White Wolf is hardly the only company that produces games with occult elements. For many people, the fantastic

is mysterious and interesting, lending an otherworldly air to their games. Unless you believe in such things, the occult and fantasy are nothing more than that.

As far as violent overtones, I'd agree with you from my sketchy perusals of the books, but this hardly differs from Star Wars, Cyberpunk, or many other games. The violence is part of the action-adventure conflict driven framework inherent in many games. Why play a game if there is no conflict? The violence level in a badly run game can reach unacceptable levels - just like everything else, the occult and violence can be taken to extremes. I have no desire to play in a game where the characters are torturing their enemies, or raping and looting. On the other hand, I'd tend to see something like the use of props in a game, such as Tarot cards, old coins, or music as something that heightens the feel of the game (if I'm running/playing in a fantasy game.)

Your concern about the dangers posed to the RPG hobby as a whole do merit some personal consideration, but individual companies will produce products they believe are appealing and will sell to their select market, regardless of what the impact is on the hobby as a whole. At the moment, White Wolf's line of Storyteller games appear to be quite popular (much to the chagrin of devotees of other systems.) The solution is as you have already done: to purchase only those games that happen to meet your criteria for a good game, and leave the rest on the shelf. Others may have other opinions as to the worth of your choices, but you should respect their choices as they do yours.

## SHEPHERD'S PIE#1

Welcome to Interregnum!

I enjoyed your discussion of the Holy Grail and virtue. I think you hit on a key note in your last few paragraphs. *"It is up to the players to play as they wish...keep it simple so there is a common understanding among the players and the game remains enjoyable."* There are different standards for different campaigns, and groups. My particular leanings are toward games where the characters are pushed to make hard choices, whether or not they are personally what I consider moral. It is pointless to try to impose a standard of behavior on characters - often I know by long association with the players what type of characters they are likely to play.

Even if I have no idea how a character

will be played, it is far better to let the game run as it may unless there is a serious problem. I'd rather characters in my game be interesting twisty, and sometimes even over the edge, than try to fit them to whatever I may want to see in the game. It has always worked best that way.

The cyberpunk setting for example is often harsher and more brutal than other genre's, either viscerally, through the level of violence, or the ambiguity of moral position in a high-tech fast past world. Yet I have seen just as many characters who could be considered "good" as in other games I've run, even if they might have harder edges and darker pasts.

## 8-TRACK #V

*"One thing that bothers me is that in some cases some people's belief systems aren't treated respectfully."*

I can agree with you on this one, having seen many stereotypes of characters floating through various games. The fanatic preacher is only one of many. Many of the rabbis, priests, and religious laypeople that I have known have been decent, rational and intelligent people. It is a pity that the same biases that cause right wing religious groups to castigate gaming as "the tool of Satan" also make it easier for gamers and others to see all religious people of whatever faith as kooks or irrational fire-and-brimstone breathers.

Though I do not consider myself particularly religious within my own faith, I am fascinated by many religions, both from a personal and anthropological standpoint. I would hope that anyone interested enough in playing a character from or in another culture would do the barest reading to acquire some scant knowledge of that which they imitate, rather than relying on common perception and stereotype.





## SUPERNORMAL OR JUST SUPERSILLY

# QUOTES OF CHAMPIONS

"Whoever constructed this secret base sure doesn't know how to order furniture."  
Brandon Skyler, kld genius.

"This is so demeaning! This is the last underwear ad I'll ever do!"  
[after drawing briefs on the burly Champlons template in the character sheet.]

"Did you draw breasts on that?"

"Well, yeah. I tried."

(Two female players talking about the Champlons character outline.)

"After the trip to Sweden."

(what was finally put beneath the offending picture.)

"I'm an expert in paranormal visitors. I find that they're often attracted to the nightlight in LA..." - Lt. Christlan Vanoe.

"These are donuts. See the sprinkles? Go for the sprinkles."

Vance explaining the finer points of dining to a time-lost 12th century Knight, Sir Donham.

"If your character had a hyperactive disorder - could the rest of us take it as a disadvantage?"

[all the other players to me :-]

"A demon ruling LA? Not too farfetched." - Vance.

"How do I tell if someone is a Minion of the Demon?"

"You ask them...nicely." Skyler and Sir Donham.

"If you don't like the way I drive, get the hell off the hood." Vance.

"We're superheroes - what the hell, people?"

A player after listening to the others debate about the best way of avoiding being shot at.

